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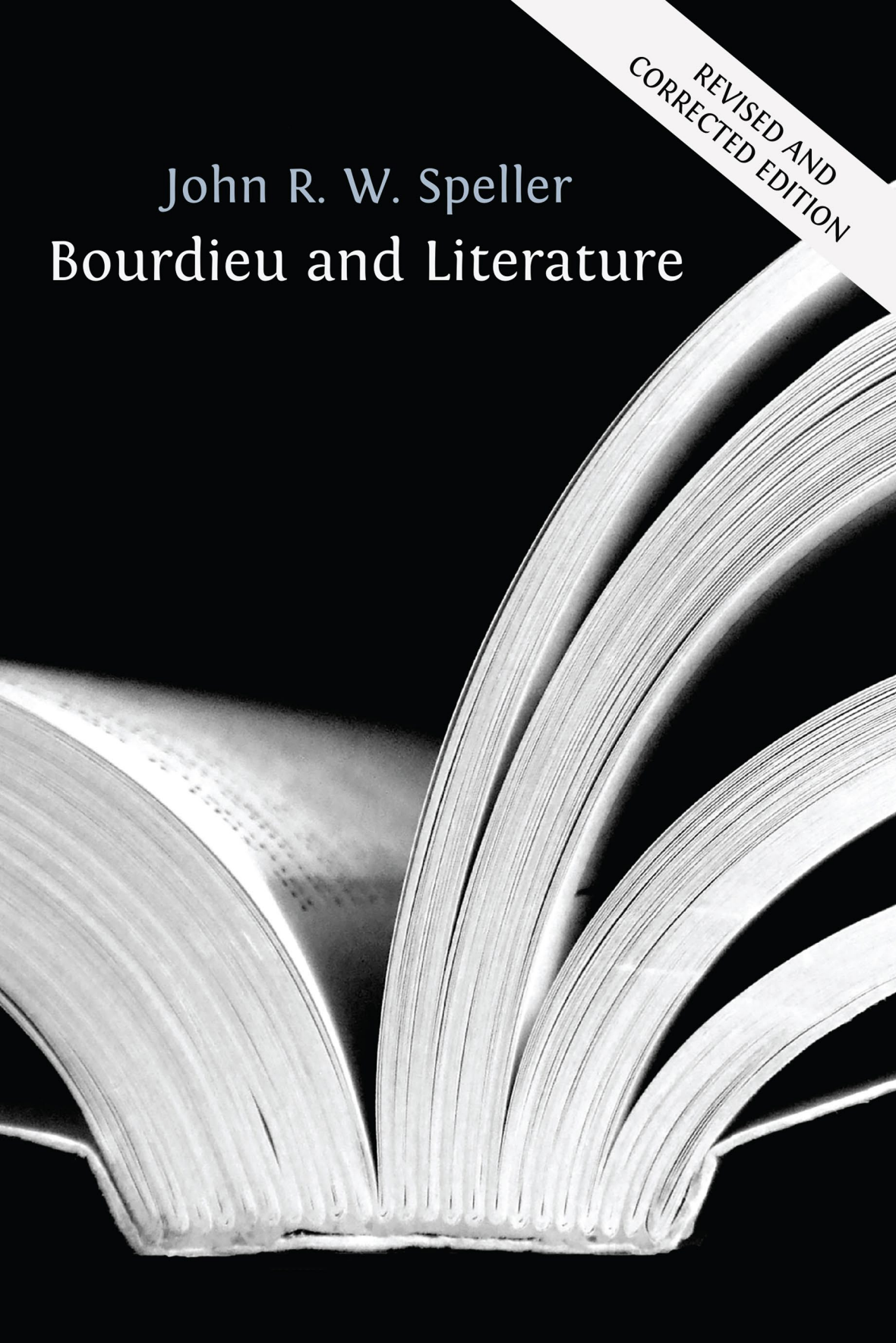
John R. W. Speller

# Bourdieu and Literature



# BOURDIEU AND LITERATURE

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*John R.W. Speller*

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*For my wife, Magda, who bore the writing of this book with patience and good humour.*

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| *AA* | *L'Amour de l'art : les musées d'art européens et leur public* (*The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*) |
| *CD* | *Choses dites* (*In Other Words*) |
| *CF1* | *Contre-feux 1* (*Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market*) |
| *CP* | *Propos sur le champ politique* |
| *D* | *La Distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*) |
| *DM* | *La Domination masculine* (*Masculine Domination*) |
| *E* | *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (*Sketch for a Self-Analysis*) |
| *ETP* | *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*) |
| *FCP* | *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* |
| *H* | *Les Héritiers : les étudiants et la culture* (*The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture*) |
| *HA* | *Homo academicus* (*Homo Academicus*) |
| *I* | *Interventions 1961–2001 : science sociale et action politique* (*Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action*) |
| *ID* | *La Production de l'idéologie dominante* |
| *IRS* | *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* |
| *LE* | *Libre-échange* (*Free Exchange*) |
| *LL* | *Leçon sur la leçon* |
| *MM* | *La Misère du monde* (*The Weight of the World*) |
| *MP* | *Méditations pascaliennes* (*Pascalian Meditations*) |
| *MS* | *Le Métier de sociologue : préalables épistémologiques* (*The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*) |

| | |
|---|---|
| *NE* | *La Noblesse d'État : grandes écoles et esprit de corps* (*The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*) |
| *R* | *La Reproduction : éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (*Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*) |
| *RA* | *Les Règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (*The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*) |
| *RP* | *Raisons pratiques : sur la théorie de l'action* (*Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*) |
| *SP* | *Le Sens pratique* (*The Logic of Practice*) |
| *SSR* | *Science de la science et réflexivité* (*Science of Science and Reflexivity*) |

References to the French editions of Bourdieu's published works are given in the text, using the abbreviations listed above. Translations are supplied in the footnotes, using shortened forms of the English titles. For works for which no published English translation has been identified, no English title is supplied here. Given the range of literature referred to in the text, it has not proved possible in every case to trace English translations of works originally written in other languages. In such cases, translations are my own and are indicated by the initials J.S. Full details of both the French editions and the translated works are given in the bibliography at the end of the book.

# Introduction

At the time of his death in 2002, Pierre Bourdieu was a contender for the position of France's foremost intellectual, and one of the most influential sociologists in the world. He wrote on a wide range of topics, from Kabyle society to French cultural taste, and from housing policy to fine art. Translated into some forty languages, his works have become standard points of reference in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, art history, cultural studies, politics, sociology, and beyond. Yet Bourdieu's work on literature has so far received relatively little attention, especially in the Anglophone world. If few literature students in French universities have read even a single page of Bourdieu, this is even more likely to be true of their counterparts across the Channel and the Atlantic.[1]

Certainly, Bourdieu's sociology of culture can appear harsh and critical, to the extent that some have even interpreted it as an attack on the very institutions of art and literature. In this view, Bourdieu's sociology would seem to reduce all high art and literature merely to its social uses as an instrument of distinction, denying it any role other than that of reproducing and naturalising class divisions. Individual literary works would appear merely as the euphemised expressions of struggles for power and prestige within a narrowly defined literary field. Writers, and the battery of critics, scholars, and publishers supporting them, would ignore or deny the commercial and symbolic interests which drive them, so involved are they in the literary game, and so accepting are they of its unspoken rules and premises (what Bourdieu calls the field's *illusio*). Not only is this sociology reductionist, the critics argue, but the sociologist, who steps in as a self-styled demystifier, commits the double (and sometimes simultaneous) faux pas of stating the obvious and the taboo.

1 See Jean-Pierre Martin, 'Avant-propos : Bourdieu le désenchanteur', in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2010), pp. 7–21 (p. 7).

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This study sets out to go beyond these arguments, which have been debated often enough (not least by Bourdieu). First, it examines Bourdieu's methodology for analysing literary works, and demonstrates that it offers genuine insights for those involved in literary studies. Second, it shows that although Bourdieu was keenly aware of the role that consecrated literature could play in reproducing class distinctions, his sociology also accorded literature a privileged status in struggles for political and aesthetic autonomy. Third and finally, this study shows how Bourdieu's belief in literature as a force for emancipation was reflected in the series of concrete proposals he made for the reform of literary education, in both schools and universities.

Chapter 1 situates Bourdieu's work on literature within the intellectual fields in which it was produced and received. It begins by asking why literature, despite its importance to the development of Bourdieu's concept of the field, has often been treated as marginal in accounts of his sociology. The chapter first reconstructs the Anglophone reception of Bourdieu's literary sociology, focusing on the main objections made against it: reductionism, determinism, difficulty of style, dependence on the French case, and incompatibility with dominant forms of literary theory. It then turns to the French intellectual field in which Bourdieu's position was formed, especially his ambivalent relations with Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, structuralism, and post-structuralism. In this way, the chapter follows Bourdieu's own principle of double historicisation, reading his work on literature both in relation to its original field of production and in relation to the later field of reception from which this study proceeds.

Chapter 2 reconstructs Bourdieu's method for analysing literary works, authors, and fields. It begins with the epistemological foundations of his sociology, especially his debt to Gaston Bachelard and to a relational conception of scientific knowledge. It then sets out the main levels of a Bourdieusian literary analysis: the position of the literary field within the field of power, the structure of positions and position-takings within the literary field, the trajectory and habitus of individual writers, and the corresponding space of works and possibilities. The chapter shows how this method seeks to overcome the opposition between internal reading and external analysis by relating formal and stylistic choices to the social space in which they become possible and meaningful. It also

compares Bourdieu's approach with biography, close reading, Russian Formalism, structuralism, and Marxist criticism, before considering attempts to extend it to other national fields and to world literary space.

Chapter 3 examines Bourdieu's concept of autonomy and its central place in his account of the literary field. It traces his reconstruction of the French literary field as a long process of differentiation, autonomisation, and symbolic capital accumulation, through which literature gradually acquired its own rules, values, and forms of authority. The chapter focuses especially on the nineteenth century, when the opposition between art and money helped to produce a restricted field of relatively autonomous literary production, inhabited by writers such as Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Émile Zola. It then turns to Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus Affair, which Bourdieu presents as the culmination of this process: the moment when literary autonomy enabled a new form of political authority, that of the engaged intellectual. Finally, the chapter considers the tensions and limits of Bourdieu's account, especially regarding the relation between autonomy and literary value, before examining his later claim that the cultural fields had entered a period of regression under the pressure of commercial concentration, media consecration, and new forms of patronage.

Chapter 4 examines Bourdieu's *science des œuvres* ('science of works') and addresses the charges of reductionism and disenchantment. It situates his conception of scientific knowledge in relation to Bachelard's philosophy of science, before reading his analysis of Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* as a test case for exploring the contrast between literary and sociological representations of social reality. The chapter argues that Bourdieu does not simply oppose science and literature, but distinguishes between them as two ways of objectifying the social world: sociology makes social structures explicit, while literature renders them sensible through fiction, character, situation, and style. It then compares this epistemological position with post-structuralist and postmodern theories of textuality. Finally, the chapter explores possible crossovers between literature and sociology, from Bourdieu's own use of literary techniques to the ways in which writers such as Annie Ernaux have translated sociological insight into literary form.

Chapter 5 examines the place of literature and literary effects in Bourdieu's political thought. It begins with his analysis, with Luc

Boltanski, of how dominant political discourse is produced and spread through commonplaces, euphemisms, oppositions, and rhetorical automatisms. The chapter then discusses Bourdieu's use of literary techniques in his political writing, including parody, montage, defamiliarisation, quotation, and the critical reading of public language. It argues that, for Bourdieu, literature can have political effects not simply by serving as a vehicle for critical messages, but as a repertoire of forms capable of altering perception, exposing symbolic domination, and challenging dominant representations of the social world. Finally, it follows Bourdieu's attempts, through initiatives such as *Liber* and the International Parliament of Writers, to bring writers, artists, researchers, and intellectuals together so that they could intervene more effectively in public life, and considers why these projects proved so difficult to sustain.

Chapter 6 examines the cultural policy implications of Bourdieu's work on literature. It begins with the apparent difficulty created by his early sociology of education, taste, and cultural consumption, in which literary competence appears as a socially selective form of cultural capital, rewarded by the school and converted into an instrument of distinction. The chapter then shows how this critique is modified when Bourdieu turns from diagnosis to prescription: in his proposals for educational reform, literature is revalued as a resource for developing linguistic, historical, critical, and creative capacities. Finally, the chapter follows Bourdieu's reflections on the conditions required to sustain non-commercial literary and artistic culture beyond the school. It argues that Bourdieu's cultural policy thinking is organised around an apparent antinomy: autonomous cultural production requires state protection against the market, but also vigilance against the dependence, normalisation, and symbolic control that state support can introduce. In this sense, the chapter presents Bourdieu's position as a defence of protected autonomy: the use of public resources to make literary culture more widely accessible while preserving the independence on which its critical and inventive powers depend.

In summary, against the limited reading of Bourdieu's work on literature as a form of sociological reductionism, this study argues that his sociology offers a new and penetrating method of reading literature; that such readings retain a keen sense of literature's specificity; that Bourdieu

saw literature as a useful store of ideational and expressive resources, which could be mobilised not only in new acts of literary production, but also in political interventions and sociological analysis; and that these concerns informed the various proposals he made regarding literary education and cultural policy over the course of his career. Far from an attack on literary culture, Bourdieu's sociology of literature represents a theoretically sophisticated and wide-ranging exposé of the literary game: one that, while no doubt disenchanting, offers a fresh perspective on some of the most enduring problems in literary criticism and on some of the most urgent issues facing literature today.

# 1. Positions

Are Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of literature any more than a diversion from his more "serious" sociological research? Unlike his other major studies of social fields, which were written in collaboration with teams of researchers and co-authors, Bourdieu's work on literature seems to have been a largely solitary affair, suggesting that it was something of a sideline to which he returned when he needed a rest from his "hard" scientific labours. Again, while literature provides an important source of anecdote, illustration, and insight across much of the rest of Bourdieu's work, it appears most often in the form of epigraphs, footnotes, and annexes, contributing to the impression that literature was somehow marginal, or even ornamental, in his work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the vast metadiscourse of Anglophone introductions and general studies on Bourdieu, his work on literature has itself been sidelined, rarely receiving even an entire chapter's attention.[1] And while almost every aspect of Bourdieu's work had been covered in full-length books, compilations, and articles—from *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory* (1998), *Bourdieu and Culture* (2000), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (2005), *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* (2007), to *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities* (2006), *Pierre Bourdieu and Literacy Education* (2008), and *Bourdieu in Algeria* (2009)—it was not until 2011 that the first full-length book in English was published on *Bourdieu and Literature*.[2]

1 See Jean-Pierre Martin, 'Avant-propos : Bourdieu le désenchanteur', in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2010), pp. 7–21 (p. 7).

2 Michael Grenfell and David James, with Philip Hodkinson, Diane Reay and Derek Robbins, *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory* (London: Falmer Press, 1998); Derek Robbins, *Bourdieu and Culture* (London: Sage, 2000); Rodney D. Benson and Erik Neveu, eds, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* (London: Berg, 2007); Jeremy Lane, *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities*

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Other evidence, however, suggests that literature occupied a far more important position in Bourdieu's own mind and work than has so far been widely acknowledged. Literature was an early and recurrent theme in Bourdieu's publications. He first brought literary themes into his argument in 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur' (1966),[3] and elaborated his vision of the literary field in 'Le marché des biens symboliques' (1971).[4] Subsequently, a substantial fraction of his work centred on cultural production, and included a specific focus on literature. Many of these writings were collected, revised, and republished in 1992 as *Les Règles de l'art*. Literature also played an important role in the development of Bourdieu's theory. His key concept of field was first developed through his studies of literature,[5] which determined its initial properties and oriented its future applications. Finally, Bourdieu frequently expressed a strong sense of personal identification with his literary and artistic heroes, an identification he reiterates on the final page of his semi-autobiographical *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (2004).

There may be other reasons, then, why Bourdieu's work on literature has not received the same levels of attention as, say, his ethnographic research on Algerian peasant households, in *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972) and *Le Sens pratique* (1980); his study of patterns in European gallery and museum attendance, in *L'Amour de l'art : les musées d'art européens et leur public* (1966); his research into French education, *in Les Héritiers* (1964), *La Reproduction* (1970), *Homo academicus* (1984), and *La Noblesse d'État* (1989); or his survey-analysis of French cultural tastes, in *La Distinction* (1979), all of which have become classic points of reference in their respective fields. This chapter outlines the principal criticisms and complaints that have been levelled at Bourdieu's work on literature by

(London: Routledge, 2006), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203013571; James Albright and Allan Luke, eds, *Pierre Bourdieu and Literacy Education* (New York: Routledge, 2008), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203937501; Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein, eds, *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); John R. W. Speller, *Bourdieu and Literature* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2011), https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0027

3 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les Temps modernes*, 246 (1966), 865–906.

4 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Le marché des biens symboliques', *L'Année sociologique*, 22 (1971), 49–126.

5 See Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur'.

scholars in the Anglophone field of reception. It then provides an initial mapping of the French intellectual space in which Bourdieu's theory of the literary field was first developed and received. This route is taken partly to test Bourdieu's theory (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) that in order to form a closer understanding of cultural works, including of his own texts, it is advisable to subject them to what he terms *double historicisation* ('double historicisation'):

> Il s'agit pour cela de reconstituer à la fois l'espace des positions possibles (appréhendé à travers les dispositions associées à une certaine position) par rapport auquel s'est élaboré le donné historique (texte, document, image, etc.) à interpréter, et l'espace des possibles par rapport auquel on l'interprète. Ignorer cette double détermination, c'est se condamner à une « compréhension » anachronique et ethnocentrique qui a toutes les chances d'être fictive et qui, dans le meilleur des cas, reste inconsciente de ses propres principes (*RA*, 505).[6]

By going through this process, Bourdieu contends, we can control our preconceived ideas regarding the work and gain a greater comprehension of the author's creative project. Only then can we begin to make an unbiased or objective judgement of the work, and perhaps even find points of correspondence and constructive engagement between the author's position and our own. Let us begin, then, by meeting Bourdieu on his own terms, and applying to his own work on literature the same method he uses to study great literary authors including Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire; that is, by constructing the spaces of positions and position-takings in the fields of production and reception.

## The field of reception

Bourdieu anticipated that his work on literature would not be welcomed by scholars in literary studies. Indeed, he seems to have

6 'This requires the reconstruction both of the space of possibles (apprehended through the dispositions associated with a certain position) in relation to which the historical given (text, document, image etc.) to be interpreted is elaborated, and of the space of possibles in relation to which one interprets it. To ignore this double determination is to be condemned to an anachronistic and ethnocentric "understanding" which is likely to be fictive and which, in the best of cases, remains unaware of its own principles' (*Rules*, 309).

relished the thought of scandalising his readers with what he describes in the opening pages of *Les Règles* as 'la dernière et peut-être la pire des blessures infligées, selon Freud, au narcissisme, après celles que marquent les noms de Copernic, Darwin et Freud lui-même' (*RA*, 12).[7] Arguably, this rather outlandish claim to scandalise is more likely to provoke resistance from his readers than anything in Bourdieu's actual sociology. Bourdieu's case, in these opening pages, is that the sociologist dispels the belief in creators as unique, gifted individuals by analysing the manifold social and historical determinations that made them and their works what they are. This has, however, long been a common aim of literary histories and biographies. If Bourdieu's theory differs, it is in the methods he deploys to perform the literary scholar's traditional tasks more effectively.

A more plausible concern may be that sociology reduces aesthetic works and experiences, most dramatically to numerical statistics, but also to their social uses. This preconception, Bourdieu warned, had been given new life by deconstructionist and postmodernist critics in the 1980s, who looked to expose the ways in which other people, experiences, or texts could not be fully understood in terms of a totalising description or theory. Bourdieu's strong claim to science appears especially to expose him to such a critique, as it suggests he was aiming to discover some fundamental or "objective" (in the positivist sense) truth or reality. Several English-language critiques of Bourdieu's work on literature have indeed taken this line, perceiving an essentialism at the heart of Bourdieu's sociology.

This impression that Bourdieu's sociology rests on an essentialist or positivist claim to reveal the objective truth of literary works cannot be blamed entirely on critics who, influenced by the dominant academic trends of the time, saw in Bourdieu's work what they expected to find. Bourdieu is prone to making rather sweeping and finalising remarks—which he explains by his desire to *tourner le bâton dans l'autre sens* ('twist the stick in the other direction') and emphasise what his intellectual opponents leave unsaid or deny (*RA*, 304). Yet, as I will attempt to show throughout this study, it is more meaningful and productive to take these

7 'the last and perhaps the worst of those wounds inflicted, according to Freud, upon narcissism, after those going under the names of Copernicus, Darwin and Freud himself' (*Rules*, xvii).

isolated and sometimes contradictory position-takings as elements in a more complex system under continual development than to dismiss the whole edifice on the basis of partial or incomplete readings (one might only wish that Bourdieu had done the same in some of his own readings of literary critics).

Another consistent concern is Bourdieu's writing style. As Bourdieu himself writes in the preface to the English translation of *La Distinction*, his 'long, complex sentences may offend',[8] although one might suppose they would pose less of a problem for readers of Marcel Proust or Claude Simon. Added to this is an initially intimidating system of concepts and technical terminology, which at best enables him to communicate complex and nuanced points, and at worst seems to make simple points unnecessarily opaque. These obstacles are compounded in *Les Règles*, the book in which much of Bourdieu's work on literature is contained, which is arguably his worst (at least, it has been the least well received and perhaps the least well read). A patchwork of ideas and essays spanning decades, it suffers from inner inconsistencies and poor organisation.[9] As a result, the cogency of Bourdieu's argumentation and the coherence of his methodology can become lost, particularly to readers in the field of literary studies who are unfamiliar with his wider work.

In the view of Toril Moi, 'the difficulty that Bourdieu represents for literary critics has to do with the fact that he inherits a philosophical tradition that remains poorly understood in U.S. literary criticism'.[10] In Moi's reading, Bourdieu takes his place among a group of twentieth-century thinkers including Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, J. L. Austin, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. This is true, although one might think there is nothing particularly unfamiliar about the names Moi has chosen. More to the point would have been to cite, from the sociological and anthropological tradition, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Norbert Elias,

8 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989), p. xiii.

9 As Wendy Griswold put it, 'It is as if Bourdieu cleaned out his desk and put a staple through everything that involved literature.' Wendy Griswold, 'Review of The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field', *American Journal of Sociology*, 104 (1998), 972–75 (p. 974).

10 Toril Moi, 'The Challenge of the Particular Case', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 58.4 (1997), 497–508 (p. 498), https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-58-4-497

Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Marcel Mauss; and from the philosophy of science, Gaston Bachelard, Ernst Cassirer, Georges Canguilhem, and Alexandre Koyré, as well as a number of contemporaries, sociologists, and historians, less famous than these.[11] That said, there are also a surprising number of parallels and crossovers between Bourdieu's sociology and established literary theories, and even with literature itself—so many, in fact, that he tried for a long time to bury or repress his proximity to literary writers and critics, because he was working in a scientific milieu.

According to John Guillory, 'what seems to have troubled Bourdieu's U.S. readers most is the implication that social change cannot be the conscious and intended effect of individual or collective action'. This is particularly true, Guillory argues, in the humanities, where it has become increasingly important for critics and scholars to justify their academic practice in terms of promoting positive social change. 'Literary and cultural critics', Guillory writes, 'would like to believe that vanguard theoretical discourses can lead to transformative struggles, by which the various forms of domination can be brought to an end'.[12] Yet Bourdieu held just such beliefs in the emancipatory power of sociological knowledge, as David Swartz has shown. Swartz cites Bourdieu making such hopeful claims as 'genuine scientific research embodies a threat for the "social order" and inevitably produces a political effect'; and 'the sociologist unveils and therefore intervenes in the force relations between groups and classes and he can even contribute to the modification of those relations'.[13] As we will see, Bourdieu cherished similar hopes for literature, which he believed could challenge our most deep-seated prejudices and preconceptions, as well as give voice and visibility to dominated social groups. To this end, Bourdieu urged greater collaboration between writers, artists, and researchers, whom he encouraged to combine their skills and resources to promote progressive causes.

11 For a more exhaustive list of Bourdieu's sources, see Bernard Lahire, 'Présentation : pour une sociologie à l'état vif', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), pp. 5–20 (p. 11).

12 John Guillory, 'Bourdieu's Refusal', in *Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, ed. by Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), pp. 19–43 (pp. 20–21).

13 David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 260.

Then again, Bourdieu's theories and models can appear to present a society in which there is little room for resistance or change. His is a world of "reproduction", where "determinations" and "mechanisms" seem to trap individuals into perpetuating the status quo. When applied to literature, such a picture can seem to leave little room for creativity, singularity, or genuinely autonomous judgement. It therefore sits uneasily with the literary celebration of creativity and liberty, and with the familiar self-image of writers and intellectuals as nonconformists, innovators, or even revolutionaries. More unsettling still is his suggestion that, in pursuing their "disinterested" ends, lovers of art and literature remain engaged in games of social distinction and symbolic capital accumulation. From this perspective, cultural tastes and competences are merely transformed expressions of social divisions, which they help to consolidate. Yet Bourdieu's defence of cultural fields, especially in the later stages of his career, complicates this reading. And when it came to preparing a report on the future of education at the request of the French government, he came to emphasise the positive role of cultural education, including its role as an instrument of social cohesion. As we will argue in Chapter 6, these two positions are not simply contradictory. Indeed, an awareness of how cultural capital is distributed, and of the barriers to its acquisition, could assist teachers and policymakers in widening access to literary culture among economically and culturally marginalised groups.

A final complaint is that Bourdieu's work is "too French": too deeply embedded in a specifically French intellectual problematic, and too closely tied to the particular case of France. This criticism has also been directed at his work on literature, where the emphasis on Flaubert and the nineteenth-century French literary field has raised questions about both the generalisability of his theory and its apparent confinement to the national level. In Chapter 2, we will discuss recent efforts to extend Bourdieu's theory of literary fields beyond France, both to other national traditions and to transnational literary spaces. We will also see how the application of Bourdieu's theory to diverse particular cases demonstrates its transposability, making possible what he calls a *comparatisme de l'essentiel* ('comparativism of the essential'), whereby the homologies between different fields are discerned through comparison of their historically specific forms (*RP*, 29). Before doing

so, however, the next section provides an overview of the French intellectual field in which Bourdieu's work on literature was written and his broader intellectual project elaborated. For Bourdieu himself, such contextualisation was indispensable to understanding an author's social and intellectual position, the position-takings expressed in their work, and the significance of that work in its original context.[14]

## The field of production

Why was the author of *La Reproduction* and *La Distinction* drawn to literary topics? Literature holds a particularly important place in French culture.[15] Many literary trends have originated in France, and French literature has long been regarded as among the world's finest. Paris represents, for many, the capital of the World Republic of Letters: a hub for writers of all nationalities, and one of the most prestigious sources of literary consecration. Writers are commemorated in the Panthéon in Paris, have given their names to street signs and metro stations, and their faces used to appear on French coins and banknotes. Politicians pay homage to literary writers in public ceremonies, with literary references in their speeches, or by simply expressing their appreciation for the classics. Several career politicians have even become published authors. There is also a tradition of French writers taking on political duties, from François-René de Chateaubriand, who worked as Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Restoration, to Victor Hugo, who was a deputy and sat in the Chambre des pairs, and André Malraux, who served as the first Minister of Culture in the Fifth Republic. Finally, literature receives extensive media coverage in France, with dedicated television programmes and designated review sections in national newspapers. All these are signs of literature's prestigious place in French society, or in Bourdieusian terms, of the

14 See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Passport to Duke', in Brown and Szeman, eds, *Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, pp. 241–46; Pierre Bourdieu, 'Concluding Remarks: For a Sociogenetic Understanding of Intellectual Works', in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp. 263–75.

15 In this section, I draw in particular on Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Literary France: The Making of a Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), especially pp. 25–29.

symbolic capital attached to literature.

During Bourdieu's formative years, the dominant figure on the French intellectual scene was not, however, a "pure" literary writer, but *l'intellectuel total* ('total intellectual'), Jean-Paul Sartre. For the students of Bourdieu's generation, Sartre represented a sort of ideal of intellectual accomplishment, as well as the main opposition to overcome. In a prolific career, Sartre combined the roles of philosopher, writer, and *engagé* intellectual—writing plays, novels, literary criticism, and philosophical treatises, founding his own literary and political review, as well as making frequent interventions in the political arena.[16] As a consequence, literary studies became almost an obligatory point of passage for any aspiring French intellectual who wished to follow in his footsteps, or to challenge him on his own ground. It is little surprise, then, to find that as a youth Bourdieu identified naïvely with Honoré de Balzac (*E*, 87), and that for a long time he appeared set on a career as a philosopher, passing—like Sartre before him—the *agrégation* in philosophy at the prestigious École normale supérieure (ENS), in the same year as Jacques Derrida.

Yet, for reasons he links to his relatively underprivileged social background, Bourdieu always held an ambivalent attitude towards both literature and philosophy. Bourdieu's trajectory to the apex of French academia was far from typical.[17] Born in a village in the Béarn region of southern France, where his father had been a postal worker and his grandfather a sharecropper, Bourdieu was the first in his family to finish high school, and was marked out at the ENS by his thick regional accent amongst his predominantly Parisian colleagues. No doubt, Bourdieu's social background contributes to explain his bitter critique of *l'idéologie du don* ('ideology of gifts'), and his thinly veiled ressentiment of conspicuous displays of verbal fluency and cultural prowess. It also explains why he always presented himself as an outsider in the academic community and always sought to ground his work in ordinary reality. Bourdieu came to see his conversion first to ethnography in the late 1950s and then to sociology, with their measurements, interviews, and

16 See Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et « Les Temps Modernes »: une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

17 Scott McLemee, '"Not a Fish in Water": Close Colleague of Bourdieu Reflects on His Influence', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 25 January 2002, p. 18.

observations, as partly a reaction to the bookish culture of the closed, self-referential French academic universe of the 1960s and 1970s, which was still dominated by literature and philosophy—and as an attempt to break with its aestheticising and de-realising tendencies (*E*, 59).

'Infiniment proches, et infiniment éloignés' is how Bourdieu describes his feelings about Sartre, in an article first published in 1993.[18] Bourdieu's conversion to the social sciences, which the author of *L'Être et le néant* held in low esteem; his strong commitment to science, against Sartre's attempt to be all things to all people; his critique of the ideology of *le créateur incréé* ('uncreated creator'), to which Sartre's existentialism had given new life; and his scepticism of intellectuals who sought too keenly the celebrity status Sartre had acquired, can all be understood as a reaction against everything that the Sartrean enterprise represented in his eyes. Yet in order to challenge Sartre, Bourdieu knew that he must also engage with him, and it was above all in his work on literature that this contact and combat took place. Bourdieu's first article on literature, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', was published in Sartre's journal *Les Temps modernes*, and appears to pay tribute to Sartre's theory of the *projet originel* ('original project')—but then attempts to find a new way forward. Likewise, Bourdieu's enduring focus on Flaubert should be understood in the light (or shadow) of Sartre's final work: his monumental, interminable, and increasingly amphetamine-fuelled biography of the same author, *L'Idiot de la famille*.[19]

It is in *Les Règles*, however, that Sartre's presence can be felt most clearly. The section entitled 'Questions de méthode' deliberately echoes the first part of *Critique de la raison dialectique*,[20] in which the existentialist philosopher outlines the method of enquiry he uses in *L'Idiot de la famille*. This section also contains a reworked version of Bourdieu's analysis of the Sartrean project, upon which Anna Boschetti's full-length study *Sartre et « Les Temps Modernes » : une entreprise intellectuelle* is based (*RA*, 291–350).[21] In the prologue and first part of *Les Règles*, Bourdieu's

18 'Infinitely close, and infinitely distant' (trans. J.S.). Pierre Bourdieu, 'A propos de Sartre', *French Cultural Studies*, 4.12 (1993), 209–11, https://doi.org/10.1177/095715589300401202

19 Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille : Gustave Flaubert de 1821–1857*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–1972).

20 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

21 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Sartre', *London Review of Books*, 2.22 (20 November 1980), 11–12.

analysis of Flaubert's paradoxical social position and the determinations that weighed upon it is intended to counter Sartre's account of Flaubert's 'original project': the idea that Flaubert's life and work can be understood through a fundamental choice by which he made himself into the writer he became (*RA*, 310). And in the postscript, 'Pour un corporatisme de l'universel' (*RA*, 545–58), Bourdieu proposes a course of political action by intellectuals that attempts to overcome the limitations of the Sartrean model of charismatic intervention on every issue of the day. Published at the peak of Bourdieu's career and at the commencement of his more prominent political activism, the appearance of *Les Règles* (which inevitably drew comparisons with Sartre) can thus be understood as an attempt to affirm at once his proximity and distance from France's most recent great public intellectual, and as a bid for his crown.

## Lévi-Strauss and structuralism

Sartre was not the only major player on the French intellectual scene who had a formative influence on Bourdieu. As Bourdieu recalls in the preface to *Le Sens pratique*, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss exerted a tremendous influence over his contemporaries by offering 'à toute une génération une nouvelle manière de concevoir l'activité intellectuelle qui s'opposait de façon tout à fait dialectique à la figure de l'intellectuel "total"' (*SP*, 7–8).[22] Lévi-Strauss gave legitimacy to the social sciences at a time when they were structurally subordinate in relation not only to literature and philosophy, but also to the natural sciences (*E*, 29). Situated in the Faculty of Letters, the social sciences were defined doubly negatively: as neither literary nor scientific, and as applied and empirical rather than pure and theoretical (*HA*, 160). Indeed, Bourdieu goes so far as to describe sociology in the early 1960s as a pariah discipline (*E*, 52), looked down upon as a refuge for failed philosophers and considered close, because of its object, to journalism (*CD*, 15; *E*, 28). Bourdieu admits that the new prestige Lévi-Strauss brought to ethnology helped him, subjectively, to make the transition from philosophy, then at its apogee, to ethnography, where his first

22 'a whole generation was led to adopt a new way of conceiving intellectual activity that was opposed in a thoroughly dialectical fashion to the figure of the politically committed "total" intellectual represented by Jean-Paul Sartre' (*Logic*, 1–2).

works were those of a self-confessed 'structuraliste heureux' (*SP*, 22).[23]

Yet even Lévi-Strauss, who played detached scientist to Sartre's *engagé* humanist, was still altogether too "literary" for Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's view, Lévi-Strauss had never fully 'rompu avec la tradition du voyage littéraire et le culte artistique de l'exotisme' (*E*, 61),[24] focusing, in his famous work *Tristes Tropiques*,[25] on faraway lands, rather than studying more pressing and immediate realities. Lévi-Strauss had also set the trend for 'literary structuralism' by switching seamlessly, in an influential essay with Roman Jakobson,[26] from the analysis of myths and kinship structures to the study of literature. Lévi-Strauss's transposition of structuralist principles from the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure to the study of social constellations implied that they could be turned towards the study of any other social reality, such as rites, myths, matrimonial strategies, or works of art and literature, all of which could be studied as languages. Bourdieu came to see 'la propension à étendre presque sans limites la posture du *lector*, qui a caractérisé certaines formes du structuralisme ethnologique et sémiologique' (*RA*, 498–99)[27] as the faulty principle behind systematic errors in empirical research, including that of Lévi-Strauss. Firstly, because it introduced a *biais théoriciste*, or what Bourdieu would later describe more broadly as a *biais scolastique*: a tendency to mistake the theoretical model of practice for the practical logic of action itself. Secondly, because it bypassed the dimension of symbolic power, which overdetermines any literal signification. Thirdly, because it fixed the sense of words and documents, of which the meaning is often contested in reality (*SP*, 56–70; *CD*, 132–43).

Sartre and Lévi-Strauss represented to Bourdieu two sides of a false alternative. The originality of structuralism, Bourdieu argued in his early article 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge' (1968), was, paradoxically, to have 'contributed to wiping out the fictitious originality assigned to anthropological knowledge by the spontaneous

23 'a blissful structuralist' (*Logic*, 9).

24 'broken with the tradition of the literary journey and the artist's cult of exoticism' (*Sketch*, 43).

25 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955).

26 Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, '« Les Chats » de Charles Baudelaire', *L'Homme*, 2.1 (1962), 5–21, https://doi.org/10.3406/hom.1962.366446

27 'the propensity to extend almost limitlessly the posture of *lector*, which has characterized certain forms of ethnological and semiological structuralism' (*Rules*, 393).

theory of such a knowledge' by applying to the study of human relations and practices the 'relational' or 'structuralist' principles that were already used to understand physical phenomena.[28] Yet, by focusing on structures, structuralism had lost sight of the element of individual agency upon which existentialism placed its emphasis. Existentialism insists on the role of the freely choosing subject, who determines their own destiny. Bourdieu's theory of the 'dialectical relation' between habitus and field, according to which our 'subjective' ability to interpret and respond to the world is limited by our 'objective' conditions of existence (that is, our position in the social structure or field, and the access to economic and cultural resources that this position provides), was formulated to overcome this opposition, known as the agency/structure problem.[29]

In the early part of his career, Bourdieu was careful to distance himself from structuralism, especially from its literary 'formes mondaines' (*CD*, 16).[30] His main contribution to the structuralist debate was the aforementioned article 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur' (*E*, 101). Yet by combining the notion of field—with its structuralist overtones—and that of a *projet créateur*—with its echoes of Sartre's *projet originel* and its emphasis on agency—the article was quite clearly a riposte to both opposing camps. At the same time, he delayed or downplayed the publication of his articles on literary themes. He postponed the publication of his major article on 'Le Champ littéraire' (written and presented in 1983) until 1991. He waited until 1994 before publishing a similar article in *Raisons pratiques*, which he had delivered at a conference in 1986. Several of the texts Bourdieu later republished in *Les Règles* with only minor revisions, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed' (1983), 'The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field' (1985), 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic' (1987), and 'Flaubert's Point of View' (1988), were first published in English-language journals.[31]

28 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', *Social Research*, 35 (1968), 681–706.

29 See Swartz, *Culture and Power*, pp. 8–9.

30 'merely fashionable forms' (*Other Words*, 6).

31 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', *Poetics*, 12 (1983), 311–56, https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(83)90012-8; 'The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field', *Sociocriticism*, 2 (1985), 11–24; 'The

Indeed, in an interview published in 1996, Bourdieu admits that he had hidden his proximity to writers and literary critics, because he was working in a scientific milieu. Now, he says, 'je suis arrivé à un point où je suis reconnu et où je peux me permettre, sans me suicider, d'aborder les problèmes que j'avais jusque-là étouffés. Bien sûr, des gens diront maintenant : voyez ! Bourdieu — nous l'avons toujours dit — ce n'est pas un vrai savant'.[32] Bourdieu was concerned to avoid being seen as too literary not only in order to distinguish his position from existentialism and literary structuralism, but also because he feared that his studies of education and culture would not be treated with the seriousness they, in his view, required and deserved—as objective works of science.

## The death of intellectuals

By the early 1990s, Bourdieu was both in a position to publish his work on literature and art more prominently and under pressure to do so by changes in the social status and conditions of intellectual culture. Traditional humanist intellectuals, he warned, were losing their prestigious place in French society and were increasingly cut off from the public sphere. The growing importance of broadcast media, especially radio and television, favoured the least autonomous producers, who were willing to play along with the market-driven demands of journalists and television producers. Such *intellectuels-journalistes* ('journalist-intellectuals') and *écrivains-journalistes* ('journalist-writers'), in Bourdieu's polemical terms, were monopolising public access at the expense of writers, intellectuals, and others with greater specific competence in their fields. Meanwhile, more traditional avenues

Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46 (1987), 201–10, https://doi.org/10.2307/431276; 'Flaubert's Point of View', *Critical Inquiry*, 14.3 (1988), 539–62, https://doi.org/10.1086/448455; 'Le champ littéraire', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 89 (1991), 3–46, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1991.2986

32 'I have come to a point where I am recognised and where I can allow myself, without committing suicide, to address problems that I had up to that point stifled. Of course, there are people who will now say: "Look at Bourdieu! We always said so: he is not a real scientist"' (trans. J.S.). Isabelle Graw and Pierre Bourdieu, 'Que suis-je ? Une entrevue avec Pierre Bourdieu', trans. by Véronique Gola, first published as 'Ein Interview mit Pierre Bourdieu von Isabelle Graw', *The Thing* (1996), http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/socio/bourdieu/entrevue/quesui.html

to the public sphere were being closed down, as the concentration of the publishing and bookselling industries reduced the number of outlets for specialised and experimental works.

Even in their traditional bastion, the education system, the humanities were losing their dominant position to the natural sciences and other disciplines perceived as more obviously "useful" (that is, immediately marketable), such as management and engineering. In the midst of all this, intellectuals had internalised a sense of their own irrelevance, as shown by the strangely self-defeating discourse on 'the death of intellectuals' and by rampant anti-intellectualism even in their own ranks.[33]

Swiftly, Bourdieu repackaged his work on literature and art as offering 'une vision plus vraie [...] des conquêtes les plus hautes de l'entreprise humaine' (*RA*, 16),[34] which could provide the basis for an informed defence of the threatened virtues and values of cultural producers who struggle to advance *l'universel* ('the universal') (*RA*, 545–58). Concessions were made to the heroism of Flaubert and Baudelaire, whose transgressions of the norms imposed by the Church, market, and state were offered as examples to be emulated (*RA*, 85–191). And Bourdieu appended an explicitly normative postscript, entitled 'Pour un corporatisme de l'universel', in which he calls on intellectuals from across disciplines, across Europe, and beyond, to join forces to protect the social and economic conditions of their autonomy: to analyse and resist the new forms of patronage and censorship imposed by commerce and the state; to protect independent publishers and bookshops from commercial takeovers and competition; and to struggle against prophets of doom, journalist-philosophers, and doxosophers who were usurping and eroding confidence in intellectual authority (*RA*, 545–58).

Yet despite these revisions, additions, and a normative postscript, the bulk of *Les Règles* remains predominantly critical, with few ideas for positive action or even explanations as to why non-commercial literature should be thought worth defending. Bourdieu's discourse on

33 It is difficult not to see the themes of deconstruction, silence, death, désœuvrement, and so on, which recurred in this period, as a sort of sublimated expression of the deteriorating social conditions of intellectuals (and one that only added, no doubt, to their sense of despondency and demobilisation).

34 'a vision more true and, ultimately, more reassuring, because less superhuman, of the highest achievements of the human enterprise' (*Rules*, xx).

'the universal' can seem confusing, especially as much of his earlier work (for instance, in *L'Amour de l'art* and *La Distinction*) was meant to explode the myth of universal cultural values. The main proposal Bourdieu derives from these analyses, his project for an international *intellectuel collectif* ('collective intellectual'), seems rather unrealistic—and proved to be so in practice. Several critics have argued that *Les Règles* does not really repair the damage done by Bourdieu's own critiques of legitimate culture and institutions (museums, schools, the *grandes écoles*), which may well themselves have contributed to the pervasive climate of anti-intellectualism.[35]

## Post-structuralism

By the time of the publication of *Les Règles*, both the existentialist and structuralist moments had passed, and a new post-structuralist and postmodern intellectual climate was establishing itself. Bourdieu was equally critical of the various forms of post-structuralism that were gaining recognition in France, via a detour through the United States. Bourdieu saw their successes in literature and philosophy departments as a defensive reaction against the rise of the natural sciences and the perceived threat from the social sciences, which had both social and epistemological consequences. Derrida's and Foucault's theories, in his view, had 'given new life, throughout the world but especially in the United States, to the old philosophical critique of the social sciences, and fuelled, under the cover of "deconstruction" and the critique of "texts", a thinly veiled form of irrationalist nihilism'.[36] By opening scientific texts, which were meant to be tested by empirical observation, to the infinite play of signifiers, their truth-claims could be belittled. By deconstructing the objects of sociological analysis (especially when it came to works of art or literature), any attempt to analyse their structure and meaning could be dismissed as reductive (*MP*, 155). The result was a loss of belief in scientific progress, and the rise of an "anything goes" mentality (*SSR*, 59).

35 According to Fredric Jameson, Bourdieu provides 'the most complex rationale for anti-intellectualism available today'. Fredric Jameson, 'How Not to Historicize Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 563–82, https://doi.org/10.1086/589482

36 Loïc Wacquant, 'Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu', Sociological Theory, 7.1 (1989), 26–63 (p. 49), https://doi.org/10.2307/202061

The most extreme position in this cluster of theories, however, was the semi-mystical strain of deconstruction that can be recognised by frequent references to Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Hölderlin, Stéphane Mallarmé, and the Marquis de Sade, and by mournful meditations on death, transcendence, and the irreducibility of persons and things to any abstract conceptualisation. Modernist literature holds a privileged place in this literary philosophy, as a discourse that exploits the inherent polysemy of language and frustrates any effort to impose a unitary meaning. For Maurice Blanchot, one of the principal theorists in this loose movement, the truth of literature, and perhaps the truth of truth, is its ambiguity, which outstrips any single reading, particularly in terms of historical context or authorial intent.[37] Such theories were extremely popular in literature departments in the 1980s and 1990s, not least because they enabled literary scholars and philosophers to reassert themselves in the face of the rising natural and social sciences, as guardians of a deeper truth (even if this was reduced to intertextuality, relativism, or ambiguity).

The publication of *Les Règles* offered Bourdieu the opportunity to deliver a riposte on behalf of sociology, to position himself on the side of the scientific community, and to mark his distance from the post-structuralists and postmodernists with whom he was sometimes confused.[38] In the 'Avant-propos', Bourdieu launches into a lively tirade against mostly unnamed philosophers and literary scholars, whom he accuses of having given up on the attempt to relate cultural works and producers to their social contexts, and for lapsing instead into repetitive affirmations of literature's ineffable and transcendent character. Against what he decries as this too ready capitulation to 'la défaite du savoir' (*RA*, 10),[39] Bourdieu cites Goethe and Kant—so inscribing himself in an Enlightenment tradition that had gone out of fashion:

> À tous ces défenseurs de l'inconnaissable, acharnés à dresser les remparts imprenables de la liberté humaine contre les empiétements de la science, j'opposerai ce mot, très kantien, de Goethe, que tous les spécialistes des sciences naturelles et des sciences sociales pourraient faire leur : « Notre

37 See Simon Critchley, *Very Little… Almost Nothing* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 31–76.

38 See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Passport to Duke', pp. 241–42.

39 'the defeat of knowledge' (*Rules*, xvi).

> opinion est qu'il sied à l'homme de supposer qu'il y a quelque chose d'inconnaissable, mais qu'il ne doit pas mettre de limite à sa recherche ». Et je crois que Kant exprime bien la représentation que les savants se font de leur entreprise lorsqu'il pose que la réconciliation du connaître et de l'être est une sorte de *focus imaginarius*, de point de fuite imaginaire, sur lequel la science doit se régler sans jamais pouvoir prétendre s'y établir (*RA*, 12–13).[40]

As we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, Bourdieu saw the task of sociology, like that of any science, as being to build a model that may never match the complexity of the object it describes, but can always be made more accurate.

Bourdieu's critique of postmodernism may seem to position him on the side of Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School,[41] which he is sometimes associated with. In fact, the relationship between Bourdieu's critique of postmodernism and that of Habermas is more complex. In *Méditations pascaliennes*, Bourdieu talks of distancing himself equally from Habermas and Foucault, and in *Science de la science et réflexivité* he specifies the very limited conditions under which Habermas's ideal speech situation might actually apply. To summarise, Bourdieu reads Habermas as envisaging an intellectual exchange subject to the strength of the best argument, as opposed to the equation of power and knowledge that is often attributed to Foucault. In other words, while Habermas gives true ideas intrinsic force, Foucault sees knowledge simply as power and imposition. We might think these rather simplistic readings of Habermas's and Foucault's respective positions (Bourdieu admits this is a condensation of Foucault's thought). They do, however, allow Bourdieu to define an evolutionary conception of the historical emergence of scientific fields, where the progress of reason is tied to social advancement (the accrual of symbolic capital), which can be understood as a kind of synthesis of Foucault and Habermas. The two-dimensionality of the scientific field is expressed clearly in the following quotation from *Méditations pascaliennes*:

40 'Against all those defenders of the unknowable, bent on manning the impregnable ramparts of human liberty against the encroachments of science, I would oppose this very Kantian thought of Goethe's, which all natural scientists and social scientists could claim as their own: "Our opinion is that it well becomes man to assume that there is something unknowable, but that he does not have to set any limit to his enquiry"' (*Rules*, xvii).

41 See Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 3–14, https://doi.org/10.2307/487859

> Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : on est aussi loin ici de la vision irénique, évoquée par Habermas, d'un échange intellectuel soumis à la « force du meilleur argument » (ou de la description mertonienne de la « communauté scientifique ») que de la représentation darwinienne ou nietzschéenne de la cité savante qui, au nom du slogan « *power/knowledge* » dans lequel on condense trop souvent l'œuvre de Foucault, réduit brutalement tous les rapports de sens (et de science) à des rapports de force et à des luttes d'intérêt. [...] Les champs scientifiques, ces microcosmes qui, *sous un certain rapport*, sont des mondes sociaux comme les autres, avec des concentrations de pouvoir et de capital, des monopoles, des rapports de force, des intérêts égoïstes, des conflits, etc., sont aussi, sous un autre rapport, des univers d'exception, un jeu miraculeux, où la nécessité de la raison se trouve instituée à des degrés divers dans la réalité des structures et des dispositions (*MP*, 158).[42]

Here we can see not only the double distance Bourdieu keeps from both Foucault and Habermas, but also his ambivalent attitude towards a scientific field that, on the one hand, fails to transcend the usual—and sometimes brutal—structures and mechanisms of human interaction, while, on the other hand, producing knowledge and technologies whose truth and usefulness cannot be reduced either to their social functions or to an effect of authority. As we will see throughout this study, the same pattern of ambivalence also defines Bourdieu's approach to the literary field, which he characterises similarly in the last lines of the 'Avant-propos' of *Les Règles* as at once the arena of 'l'affrontement souvent impitoyable des passions et des intérêts particuliers'[43] and a space in which 'les conquêtes les plus hautes de l'entreprise humaine'[44] are produced (*RA*, 16).

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42 'But we should make no mistake: we are as far here from the irenic vision, evoked by Habermas, of an intellectual exchange subject to the "strength of the best argument" (or from Merton's description of the "scientific community") as we are from the Darwinian or Nietzschean representation of the scientific world which, in the name of the slogan "power = knowledge" into which Foucault's work is too often condensed, summarily reduces all sense relations (and scientific relations) to power relations and to struggles to advance interests. [...] Scientific fields, microcosms which, in a certain respect, are social worlds like others, with concentrations of power and capital, monopolies, power relations, selfish interests, conflicts, etc., are also, in another respect, exceptional, somewhat miraculous universes, in which the necessity of reason is instituted to varying degrees in the reality of structures and dispositions' (*Meditations*, 109).

43 'the merciless clash of passions and selfish interests' (*Rules*, xx).

44 'the highest achievements of the human enterprise' (*Rules*, xx).

## Appendix: the composition of *Les Règles de l'art*

As an appendix to this chapter, it is useful to take a closer look at the composition of *Les Règles de l'art*, Bourdieu's major work on literature, in order to give a sense of its internal organisation and how it relates to Bourdieu's other writings and articles on literature. This will, hopefully, help the reader to find intertexts for particular passages, while also providing some pointers on how to read *Les Règles* itself—a work that requires a quasi-literary reading and rereading, passing backwards and forwards between passages and paying close attention to how passages, concepts, and other elements correspond (in other words, attending to what might once have been called its "organic unity"). An initial point to make is that the edition of *Les Règles* used in this study is the 1998 'Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée' in the Seuil 'Points' series. Any revisions seem, however, to have been minimal, the major difference being the addition of a useful index of names.

Proceeding through the text, the prologue—'Flaubert analyste de Flaubert', including two of the three annexes, 'Quatre lectures de *L'Éducation sentimentale*' and 'Le Paris de *L'Éducation sentimentale*' (but not 'Résumé de *L'Éducation sentimentale*')—first appeared in Bourdieu's 1975 article 'L'invention de la vie d'artiste',[45] published in Bourdieu's journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. The version in *Les Règles* has been considerably reworked, but contains lengthy verbatim passages taken from the original. The most obvious differences are two lengthy citations from *L'Éducation sentimentale* in the original article, which allow the reader to relate Bourdieu's analysis more readily to the text, and a light-hearted game, 'Faites vous-même votre *L'Éducation sentimentale*', which invites the reader to imagine where modern publishers, business figures, artists, and journalists would be situated in the structure of the social space represented in *L'Éducation sentimentale*.

Part One, 'Trois états du champ', contains significant unpublished material, particularly the section 'Baudelaire nomothète' in the first chapter. This section is complemented by a case study of the same author in *Méditations pascaliennes* (*MP*, 101–09). The rest of the first chapter of *Les Règles* is based on Bourdieu's analysis of the French

45 Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'invention de la vie d'artiste', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1 (1975), 67–93, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1975.2458

nineteenth-century literary field, first published in English as 'Flaubert's Point of View' (1988). The second chapter, 'L'émergence d'une structure dualiste', also contains lengthy passages from an earlier article, this time 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed' (1983), particularly the discussion of Zola. Bourdieu's analysis is longer and more elaborate in *Les Règles*. The third chapter, 'Le marché des biens symboliques', should not be confused with Bourdieu's earlier article of the same name, first published in 1971. It is, with only minor changes, his 1977 article 'La production de la croyance : contribution à une économie des biens symboliques'.[46] In this case, it is the previously published article that contains more information and analysis. The 1977 article contains further contemporary examples and illustrations, including two maps: one showing the geographical groupings of agents and institutions that also share similar social or institutional characteristics, and the other showing the locations of Parisian theatres and writers' residences.[47]

Part Two, 'Fondements d'une science des œuvres', provides insight into Bourdieu's theory and methods, and would arguably have been better placed before the studies in Part One. Prior reading of the section on 'L'espace des points de vue', in particular, and of the second chapter, 'Le point de vue de l'auteur', would allow literary scholars encountering Bourdieu for the first time to situate his theory in relation to more familiar literary theories and to grasp the fundamentals of his own approach. The first chapter, 'Questions de méthode', contains sections from Bourdieu's article 'The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field' and sections from 'Flaubert's Point of View'. Versions of 'Questions de méthode' also appear in a chapter of *Raisons pratiques* entitled 'Pour une science des œuvres' (first presented in 1986), as well as in Bourdieu's 1991 article (written in 1982) 'Le champ littéraire'. The version in *Les Règles* is the most complete, whereas the version in *Raisons pratiques* is more structured and concise. The chapter ends with a rather elliptical and enigmatic discussion of reflexivity, entitled 'Objectiver le sujet d'objectification', of which we can find a better, less dense, and more contextualised version in *Méditations pascaliennes* (*MP*, 141–45).

46 Pierre Bourdieu, 'La production de la croyance : contribution à une économie des biens symboliques', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 13 (1977), 3–43, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1977.3493

47 Ibid., pp. 11, 36.

The annex to Part Two reworks an article on Sartre first published in *The London Review of Books* in 1980. The version in *Les Règles* treats many of the same themes, but what it gains in nuance and theoretical sophistication it loses in readability. The second chapter, 'Le point de vue de l'auteur', reuses much of the same material published in 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed' and again in 'Le champ littéraire'. Another annex, 'Effet de champ et formes de conservatisme', is a précis of a longer analysis which appears in the main body of 'Le champ littéraire'.

Part Three begins with 'La genèse historique de l'esthétique pure', first published with slight differences as 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic' (1987). The version in *Les Règles* contains a useful analysis of 'Les conditions de la lecture pure' and a discussion of 'La double historicisation', which do not appear in the original. The next chapter, 'La genèse sociale de l'œil', is probably of less interest to literary scholars. Identifying parallels between art historian Michael Baxandall's notion of the 'period eye' and Bourdieu's own theory of habitus, it expands on an article written with Yvette Delsaut, first published in 1981.[48] The final chapter, 'Une théorie en acte de la lecture', provides an analysis of William Faulkner's short story 'A Rose for Emily'. Tucked away towards the very end of the book and not published elsewhere, this reading has rarely been mentioned by Bourdieu's commentators—but adds a twist after five hundred pages of extolling field analysis, by applying Bourdieu's theory and concepts to a literary text without a socioanalysis of the author. The 'da capo', 'L'illusion et l'illusio', recaps the main themes in the book, and invites the reader to begin again, 'from the beginning' (like 'A Rose for Emily' in Bourdieu's reading, which needs to be reread in light of the ending).

The postscript, 'Pour un corporatisme de l'universel', closes with a call for writers and intellectuals to join forces to defend the conditions of their autonomy. An earlier and extended version of this text was delivered as a lecture in Turin in 1989, and published the same year in the American journal *Telos*.[49] Versions were also published in French

48 Pierre Bourdieu and Yvette Delsaut, 'Pour une sociologie de la perception', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 40.1 (1981), 3–9, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1981.2131

49 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World', *Telos*, 81 (1989), 99–110, https://doi.org/10.3817/0989081099

in the journal *Politis* in 1992 and in German in 1991.[50] A version also appears in the collection of Bourdieu's political writings *Interventions: science sociale et action politique 1961–2001*, under the title 'Pour des luttes à l'échelle européenne. Réinventer un intellectuel collectif' (*I*, 257–66).

Three articles that did not make it into *Les Règles* are 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', 'Champ du pouvoir, champ intellectuel et habitus de classe',[51] and 'Le Marché des biens symboliques'. Bourdieu describes the first of these as 'à la fois essentiel et dépassé'.[52] It provides a backdrop to the genesis of the French literary field which is only hinted at in *Les Règles*, but Bourdieu admits it contains two errors: 'il tend à réduire les relations objectives entre les positions aux interactions entre les agents et il omet de situer le champ de production culturelle dans le champ du pouvoir, laissant ainsi échapper le principe réel de certaines de ses propriétés'.[53] 'Champ du pouvoir, champ intellectuel et habitus de classe', in contrast, situates the cultural field in a 'dominated dominant' position in the field of power, and takes greater account of the invisible relations between agents—such as avant-garde and bestselling authors, who might never meet or even consciously avoid each other, but whose practices remain determined by their opposition to each other. The third article, 'Le Marché des biens symboliques', set out for the first time the principles that guided his analyses in *Les Règles* (*RA*, 304 n. 17), and which are reiterated in Part Two, 'Fondements d'une science des œuvres' and 'Le point de vue de l'auteur'.

A companion work, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), contains the original English-language translations of 'The Field of Cultural Production', 'Flaubert's Point of View', and 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic'. It also features translations of 'Le Marché des biens symboliques' (original version), 'La production de la croyance', and

50 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Pour une internationale des intellectuels', *Politis*, 1 (1992), 9–15; 'Der Korporativismus des Universellen : Die Rolle des Intellektuellen in der modernen Welt', trans. by Jürgen Bolder and others, in *Die Intellektuellen und die Macht* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1991), pp. 41–65.

51 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ du pouvoir, champ intellectuel et habitus de classe', *Scolies*, 1 (1971), 7–26.

52 'essential and yet outmoded' (*Rules*, 185 n. 17).

53 'it tends to reduce the objective relations between positions to interactions between agents, and it fails to situate the field of cultural production within the field of power, thus letting slip the real principle of some of its properties' (Ibid.).

an article on Manet, 'L'institutionnalisation de l'anomie'.[54] 'Flaubert's Point of View' has been shortened slightly, mainly to avoid repetition of passages included already in 'The Field of Cultural Production'. Most usefully for our purposes, *The Field of Cultural Production* contains translations of Bourdieu's lectures during the Christian Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University in 1986 (Chapters 4–6), which are difficult to access in the original French (Chapter 6 is re-printed in a slightly amended form in *Raisons pratiques*). These lectures, which are written in the more accessible style of an oral presentation, offer a good starting point for the newcomer to Bourdieu's work on literature.

54 Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'institutionnalisation de l'anomie', *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, 19–20 (1987), 6–19.

# 2. Methods

What Pierre Bourdieu brings to literary studies is first and foremost a new method for analysing literary texts. The main aim of that method is to connect internal and external levels of analysis, the relation between which has always been problematic, when it has not been ignored or declared unfathomable. Yet Bourdieu also employs the same general theories and concepts in his studies of sport, philosophy, politics, journalism, linguistics, and education, that he applies in his studies of literature. This was another of Bourdieu's stated methodological aims: to remove the '*statut d'exception*' (*RA*, 10–11)[1] that literature holds traditionally in France, according to which it demands a specific approach. That said, there is a surprising degree of overlap between Bourdieu's sociological theory and more established modes of literary criticism. We will therefore consider Bourdieu's method in relation to more familiar critical approaches, including biography, close reading, structuralism, and Russian Formalism, in order to clarify both its originality and its continuities with earlier literary-critical theories. First, it is useful to examine the epistemological basis of Bourdieu's theory of fields, which draws in part on the philosophy of science of Gaston Bachelard, one of Bourdieu's teachers at the École normale supérieure. This opening section will explain the theoretical underpinnings of Bourdieu's method, especially his attempt to extend to the study of literature a relational mode of analysis associated with the modern sciences, including mathematics and physics. It is in this sense that Bourdieu proposes a *science des œuvres* ('science of works') capable of analysing literary texts without treating them as exceptions to ordinary forms of knowledge.

1 'status of exception' (*Rules*, xvi).

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## Epistemological preliminaries

In his 1968 work *Le Métier de sociologue* (with Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron) and the early article 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge',[2] Bourdieu set out to place the human sciences on the same epistemological footing as the natural sciences. This meant applying the relational mode of thinking to the study of social groups and establishing rules or standards by which objectivity and scientificity could be assessed. This project, Bourdieu claimed, faced particular difficulties when it came to the study of society. The first of these was, paradoxically, the sociologist's immediate familiarity with the object of study, and the apparent obviousness of common-sense explanations of social mechanisms (*MS*, 27). This difficulty was exacerbated, according to Bourdieu, by the fact that sociologists had to compete with other authorities for the legitimate representation and interpretation of social reality: in particular, with politicians and journalists who were disposed to side with popular attitudes and preconceptions (it is how they sell newspapers and win votes). In *Le Métier de sociologue*, Bourdieu drew a parallel between sociology in the 1960s and the state of the natural sciences in the eighteenth century (according to Gaston Bachelard),[3] when science was a subject for polite conversation, any person of status felt qualified to venture an opinion (often in book form), and 'auteur et lecteur pensaient au même niveau'.[4]

It is in fact from Bachelard, better known by literary scholars as the author of *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957), that Bourdieu derives the fundamental principles by which he defines scientific sociology. Bourdieu condenses these principles into the axiom that '*le fait scientifique est conquis, construit, constaté*' (*MS*, 24).[5] Scientific knowledge is defined in contrast to everyday, spontaneous or intuitive knowledge, constructed as a formalised model, and verified by empirical research and experimentation. This experimental cycle does not take the form of a series of discrete steps, performed in chronological order, but rather sets

2 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', *Social Research*, 35 (1968), 681–706.

3 Gaston Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique : contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective*, 4th edn (Paris: Vrin, 1965), pp. 24–34, cited in *MS*, 307–15.

4 'the author and the reader thought at the same level' (*Craft*, 233).

5 'the scientific fact is won, constructed, and confirmed' (*Craft*, 11).

up a to-and-fro relation between theory and experience, which support and inform each other. In this way, the construction of the theoretical model as a system of intelligible relations entails a rupture with visible appearances, which are, however, the basis of its verification—insofar as the theory can explain and predict the visible phenomena.

The break with spontaneous or intuitive knowledge is a rupture with the substantialism of primary experience, with its belief in essences and its attempt to discover the inner properties of things. From a properly scientific perspective, Bachelard writes, 'il n'y a pas de phénomène simple, le phénomène est un tissu de relations'.[6] The objective of science, therefore, is to model this invisible 'noumenal structure' (Bachelard) or 'generative structure' (Bourdieu), which somehow necessitates the observable phenomena, and which is, for Bourdieu as for Bachelard, the 'real' or 'objective' reality. Hence Bachelard's maxim: 'Au commencement était la Relation',[7] and Bourdieu's motto (with a play on Hegel): 'Le réel est relationnel' (*RP*, 17).[8] The model generated by constructing a system of relations can then be verified against experience, or observable phenomena. In 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', Bourdieu thus characterises scientific theory as 'a system of signs organized to represent, through their own relations, the relations among the objects [...] linked to what it symbolizes by a law of analogy'.[9]

The strength of this analogy, and of the principles behind it, is tested by its heuristic value and corrected in light of the problems or difficulties it encounters. In Bourdieu's words (citing the linguist and philosopher Hans Reichenbach), 'the strength of proof of a relation empirically discovered [...] is a function of those "chains of proofs" that "may be stronger than their weakest link, even stronger than their strongest link", since their validity is measured not only by the simplicity and coherence of the principles employed, but by the range and diversity of the facts considered and by the multiplicity of unforeseen consequences'.[10] It is

6 'There is no simple phenomenon; the phenomenon is a tissue of relations' (trans. J.S.). Gaston Bachelard, *Le Nouvel esprit scientifique* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1937), p. 25.

7 'In the beginning was the Relation' (trans. J.S.). Gaston Bachelard, *La Valeur inductive de la relativité* (Paris: Vrin, 1929), p. 65.

8 'The Real is Relational' (*Practical Reason*, 3).

9 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', pp. 687–88.

10 Ibid., p. 689.

important to stress the order of this procedure. As Bachelard (cited in *Le Métier de sociologue*) writes, 'le vecteur épistémologique [...] va du rationnel au réel et non point, à l'inverse, de la réalité au général, comme le professaient tous les philosophes depuis Aristote jusqu'à Bacon' (*MS*, 54).[11] What happens in reality is reinterpreted in the light of the constructed model, rather than scientific knowledge being based on direct observation (as it is in the positivist tradition). As Vandenberghe writes: 'Paradoxically, it is to render the contact with reality more precise and more penetrating that science is forced to carry out, as Gilles-Gaston Granger beautifully says, "a detour via the realm of abstraction"'.[12]

In *Le Métier de sociologue*, Bourdieu describes the positivist tendency as particularly strong in sociology, partly because of the nature of its object. 'C'est peut-être la malédiction des sciences de l'homme', he writes, 'que d'avoir affaire à *un objet qui parle*' (*MS*, 56).[13] Sociologists who accept the informants' own explanations and interpretations merely document the preconceptions of the subjects they are studying and have not yet made the break with common sense. According to Bourdieu, an adequate sociological model should be able to account for (without simply reproducing) agents' subjective experiences and representations, by constructing a model of their relative positions and trajectories in social space. The scientist must therefore adopt a particular way of thinking which Bourdieu refers to, again following Bachelard (but also the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer), as the 'relational mode of thought'.[14] Both Bachelard and Cassirer saw relational thinking, as exemplified by mathematics and physics, as one of the cornerstones of modern scientific thought (*RA*, 298 n. 8). However, we can appreciate that sociology encounters particular obstacles when it attempts to apply this general principle to the study of individuals, groups, or institutions, all of which we are encouraged to think of and treat as distinct and self-enclosed

11 'the epistemological vector [...] points from the rational to the real and not, as all philosophers from Aristotle to Bacon professed, from the real to the general' (*Craft*, 36).

12 Frédéric Vandenberghe, '"The Real is Relational": An Epistemological Analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's Generative Structuralism', *Sociological Theory*, 17.1 (1999), 32–67 (p. 38), https://doi.org/10.1177/073527519901700103

13 'It is perhaps the curse of the human sciences that they deal with a speaking object' (*Craft*, 37).

14 See Ernst Cassirer, *Substance et fonction : éléments pour une théorie du concept*, trans. by Pierre Caussat (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

entities, by the full weight of convention, the law, and even morality.

Bourdieu saw the definition of the principles of a scientific sociology as one of the first steps to creating the conditions under which they could be applied systematically. In this sense, he argues, the question 'de savoir si la sociologie est ou non une science, et une science comme les autres' shifts to the question of which 'type d'organisation et de fonctionnement de la cité savante [est] le plus favorable à l'apparition et au développement d'une recherche soumise à des contrôles strictement scientifiques' (*MS*, 103).[15] Here Bourdieu draws again on Bachelard and his image of a 'cité savante homogène et bien gardée' (*MS*, 309)[16] to describe an ideal situation in which social scientists would hold each other collectively to account according to scientific norms, and compete solely for the stakes of truth and objectivity.[17] We can notice how Bourdieu's "constative" definition of science turns into a "normative" prescription: by defining the principles of a scientific sociology, Bourdieu was also describing how it ought to be, as he observes in *Méditations pascaliennes*:

> En fait, il n'est pas d'assertion constative concernant ce champ qui ne puisse faire l'objet d'une lecture normative [...]. On ne sort pas si facilement de la logique spontanément performative du langage qui, comme je n'ai pas cessé de le rappeler, contribue toujours à faire (ou à faire exister) ce qu'il dit, notamment à travers l'efficacité constructive inséparablement cognitive et politique des classements (*MP*, 139–40).[18]

We will return to this problem in Chapter 3, where it bears on Bourdieu's use of classificatory terms such as "legitimate" and "illegitimate", and on the difficulty of distinguishing the hierarchies observed in the field from the analyst's own value judgements.

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15 'The question of whether sociology is or is not a science, and a science like others, therefore has to give way to the questions of the type of organization and functioning of the "scientific city" most conducive to the appearance and development of research that is subject to strictly scientific controls' (*Craft*, 75).

16 'well-guarded scientific city' (*Craft*, 233).

17 See Pierre Bourdieu, 'La spécificité du champ scientifique et les conditions sociales du progrès de la raison', *Sociologie et sociétés*, 7.1 (1975), 91–118, https://doi.org/10.7202/001089ar; Pierre Bourdieu, 'Le champ scientifique', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2.2–3 (1976), 88–104, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1976.3454

18 'In fact, there is no constative assertion concerning this field that cannot be read normatively [...]. One does not easily leave the spontaneously performative logic of language, which, as I have always insisted, helps to make (or make exist) what it says, especially through the inseparably cognitive and political constructive efficacy of classifications' (*Meditations*, 117).

Bourdieu's indebtedness to Bachelard in his theory of science is not something that has often been noted by Anglophone scholars. Frédéric Vandenberghe is an important exception, who gives Bachelard a special position on the long list of authors with whom Bourdieu engages (that is, both builds on and challenges):

> Bourdieu is not a syncretic but a synthetic and heretical thinker. He draws on Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and others but insofar as he critically corrects them, one could as well describe him as an anti-Durkheimian Durkheimian, an anti-Weberian Weberian, or an anti-Marxist Marxist. One could even say that he thinks with Althusser against Althusser and against Habermas with Habermas, but not— and this is probably the only exception—that he thinks with Bachelard against Bachelard.[19]

Yet there are points where Bourdieu diverges from Bachelard, some of which have direct relevance for understanding his work on literature. First, for Bachelard, scientific progress takes the form of sudden epistemological ruptures, which cannot be accounted for within the model of a continuous history. In contrast, Bourdieu emphasises that every transformation of knowledge—whether literary or scientific—involves both continuity and rupture. Moreover, he locates the impetus for such changes not in the disembodied framework of concepts and theories (the Bachelardian *problématique*), but in the struggle between flesh-and-blood agents with passions and needs. Second, the apparent universality and transhistorical communicability of certain cultural works is one of the founding presuppositions of *La Poétique de l'espace*.[20] Bachelard asks how 'cet événement singulier et éphémère qu'est l'apparition d'une image poétique singulière' can 'réagir — sans aucune préparation — sur d'autres âmes, dans d'autres cœurs.'[21] It would be difficult to find a clearer expression of what Bourdieu, following Nietzsche, calls *le dogme de l'immaculée perception* ('the dogma of immaculate perception'): the belief that works of art and literature can be appreciated and understood spontaneously, independently of the social conditions of their production and reception, and without the mediation of socially acquired dispositions.

19 Vandenberghe, '"The Real is Relational"', p. 32.

20 Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957). The following citations are from pp. 1–5.

21 'how […] this singular and ephemeral event that is the appearance of a poetic image can arise—without any preparation—in other hearts, in other minds' (trans. J.S.).

Indeed, in *La Poétique de l'espace*, Bachelard explicitly states his intention to leave his intellectual habits as a rationalist philosopher of science behind, in order to found a phenomenology of the imagination in which, he claims, 'la notion de principe, la notion de "base", serait […] ruineuse'.[22] In a remarkable example of the status of exception commonly claimed for literature and art, Bachelard refuses to apply the same principles of probability and causality to the creative sphere that he sees governing the natural world. Bourdieu, by contrast, studies literary and artistic fields according to the same general scientific principles he applies elsewhere. In his work on literature, then—and *pace* Vandenberghe—Bourdieu thinks with Bachelard against Bachelard: whereas Bachelard's writings on poetry and art mark a deliberate departure from his applied rationalism, Bourdieu extends that rationalism to literature itself. In the sections that follow, we will see how this relational mode of thinking is translated into a procedure for literary analysis.

## The author's point of view

Bourdieu presents his method of literary analysis as a response to a challenge laid down by the French poet and literary critic Paul Valéry: 'L'objet d'un vrai critique devrait être de découvrir quel problème l'auteur s'est posé (sans le savoir ou le sachant) et de chercher s'il l'a résolu ou non' (*RA*, 351).[23] He also refers to a problem posed by Gustave Flaubert:

> Où connaissez-vous une critique qui s'inquiète de l'œuvre en soi, d'une façon intense ? On analyse très finement le milieu où elle s'est produite et les causes qui l'ont amenée; mais la poétique *insciente*, d'où elle résulte? sa composition, son style ? le point de vue de l'auteur? Jamais ! (*RA*, 149)[24]

Bourdieu interprets these challenges as a call to reconstruct *l'espace des possibles* ('space of possibilities') as it presents itself to a particular

22 'the notion of principle, of a "base", would be ruinous' (trans. J.S.).

23 'The goal of a true critic should be to discover which problem the author posed himself (knowingly or not) and to find whether he solved it or not' (*Rules*, 214).

24 'Where do you know [of] a criticism? Who is there who is anxious about the work in itself, in an intense way? They analyse very keenly the setting in which it is produced and the causes leading to it; but as for the unknowing [inscient] poetics? Where does it come from? And the composition and style? The author's point of view? Never!' (*Rules*, 87).

author and to understand, as if from *le point de vue de l'auteur* ('the author's point of view'), their stylistic and thematic choices, given the manifold social and artistic pressures and constraints they were under.

To this end, Bourdieu undertakes an analysis operating on three levels, which are nested like Russian dolls fitting one inside another. First, Bourdieu analyses the position of the literary field in the field of power. Next, he maps the positions of individuals, groups, and institutions in the literary field. Finally, he traces the genesis of agents' habitus. To this nested model, we need to add the analysis of literary texts in the space of works. It might also be useful to add the transnational dimension of world literary space, as developed by Pascale Casanova. Like Bachelard's epistemological checklist, these three steps need not be thought of as discrete stages, or a rigid programme. Each level of analysis should take account of the information provided by the others, so that the analysis can start at any level. Thus, *Les Règles* begins (disconcertingly, if one begins, as we have, by reading Bourdieu's theoretical statements) with an internal analysis of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (*RA*, 19–71). Yet from this reading he is able to follow several clues with regard to Flaubert's social position and trajectory, which are corroborated by his sociological research and vice versa. In this respect, to borrow an image Pierre Duhem uses to describe structural research more generally (although resisting, for reasons to be explained in Chapter 4, the suggestion of aestheticisation), Bourdieu's model resembles 'a symbolic painting to which incessant retouching gives greater extent and unity [...], while each detail, cut off from the whole, loses any meaning and no longer represents anything'.[25]

## The field of power

If we begin at the macro level of Bourdieu's analysis, then, we should locate the literary field as something like a status group (Weber) in the field of power. The field of power is defined in *Les Règles* as 'l'espace des rapports de force entre des agents ou des institutions ayant en commun de posséder le capital nécessaire pour occuper des positions dominantes

25 Pierre Duhem, cited by Bourdieu in 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', p. 688.

dans les différents champs (économique ou culturel notamment)' (*RA*, 353).[26] Although close to the notion of a dominant class, the concept redirects the focus from isolated agents, groups, and populations to the structured relations among dominant positions. The notion of a field of power also implies a break with the representation of the social world found in some forms of Marxism, which pits the owners of the means of production against the labour force. The field of power is split between competing factions (the fields) and polarised between the holders of economic and political power, who are dominant overall, and the holders of cultural capital, who are dominated dominators: structurally subordinate, yet able to oppose the dominant group with a specifically symbolic power of consecration, legitimation, and critique.

What Bourdieu describes in his studies of French culture and society, including *La Distinction* and *La Noblesse d'État*, is an historical state of the field of power, which—importantly for understanding the focus of Bourdieu's work on literature—took its present form during the second half of the nineteenth century, in Flaubert's time, when cultural capital became almost entirely dissociated from economic capital. Indeed, Bourdieu finds a very accurate depiction of the field of power written into *L'Éducation sentimentale*. At one pole, Bourdieu positions rich bankers such as M. Dambreuse, who have very high levels of economic capital and other material assets, but relatively little cultural capital (educational qualifications, cultural knowledge, artistic competence). At the other pole, he positions the artists and intellectuals who gather at the art dealer Arnoux's, who have very high levels of cultural capital but relatively little economic capital. In the central positions, Bourdieu places lawyers, doctors, and upper-level state bureaucrats, who possess approximately equal levels of both economic and cultural capital. This is where Bourdieu situates Frédéric Moreau (and Flaubert himself).

Yet Bourdieu also claims that the structure of the field of power is transhistorical and even quasi-universal, surviving in various forms over the centuries and arising in different cultures and civilisations.[27]

26 'the space of relations between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (economic or cultural notably)' (*Rules*, 215).

27 Loïc Wacquant and Pierre Bourdieu, 'From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Noblesse d'État', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10.3 (1993), 19–44 (pp. 22–24), https://doi.org/10.1177/026327693010003002

Bourdieu follows Georges Duby to find a precedent in the opposition between the *bellatores* (those who fight) and *oratores* (those who pray) in medieval society, and refers to Georges Dumézil's trifunctional hypothesis, which discovers the same triad in Indian society (which splits between the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes), as well as in various mythic systems.[28] The third term refers to the dominated: peasants, commoners, or workers. As the forms of power change, the balance of power also varies over time and between national traditions. Indeed, Bourdieu claims that many social struggles and upheavals, sometimes explained by class conflict, can be better understood as extensions of struggles among dominant groups over their forms of capital, or the value of their capitals and their rates of exchange, as dominant factions ally themselves provisionally with the dominated (*MP*, 124).

Bourdieu offers few clues, however, as to how to gauge the position of a literary field in the field of power. The value of any field's capital is tied to its autonomy, which can be measured—but how accurately or consistently?—by writers' ability to resist or ignore external (especially religious, political, and commercial) demands. This resistance can also be seen in the works writers produce. It appears in the degree of 'retraduction ou de *réfraction*'[29] they impose on religious or political representations (*RA*, 360): that is, in their artistic freedom at the level of form, and in their ability to choose their own content—for example, by depicting scenes judged vulgar, ignoble, or merely mediocre according to external social norms. Finally, the symbolic power and autonomy accorded to writers are also manifested in their ability to contest temporal powers without loss of status or retribution (*RA*, 360–61). These measures seem rather inexact, however, and in practice Bourdieu only locates the position of the French literary field in the field of power in a rather approximate and impressionistic way.

Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson identifies several more quantifiable variables that can be used to measure the stock of literary capital, in comparison with other periods and societies.[30] Ferguson analyses the

28 See Georges Duby, *Les Trois Ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); Georges Dumézil, *L'Idéologie tripartie des Indo-Européens*, Collection Latomus, 31 (Brussels: Latomus, 1958); Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée I : L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

29 'translation or *refraction*' (*Rules*, 220).

30 Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Literary France: The Making of a Culture* (Berkeley, CA:

number of books published and bought each year, the time spent reading per inhabitant, the number of publishers and bookshops, instances of official consecration (writers appearing on banknotes, stamps, monuments, and street names, etc.), and press coverage (space allotted to literary topics in newspapers, time given to literature on television programmes). Conversely, high levels of illiteracy, a weak distribution network (including publishers, libraries, magazines, newspapers), the absence of official instances of consecration, and so on, can be used as evidence of a comparative lack of cultural capital.[31]

Positioning the literary field in the field of power (or gauging the symbolic value accorded to the specific capital of the writer) can help us understand why particular authors were drawn to the profession and contextualise many of their practices and representations once they arrived there. For example, when we know that the literary field occupies a dominated dominant position in the field of power, we can understand the ambivalence many writers express or manifest towards both the dominant and the dominated, both in their writings and by their fluctuating political allegiances (*RA*, 353). To different degrees depending on their positions in the literary field, writers seek to define themselves both against the "vulgar" crowd and the "philistine" bourgeois, compensating for what they lack in economic capital by accumulating cultural capital.

The notion of cultural capital receives its most systematic theoretical formulation in 'The (Three) Forms of Capital' (1986).[32] There, Bourdieu identifies an 'objectified state' in which cultural capital can exist: 'in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)'. Cultural capital can also exist in an 'embodied state; i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body'. Cultural capital can be internalised in the course of socialisation (whether accompanied or not by a formal education), which inculcates the 'dispositions' and 'schemes of perception and appreciation' necessary to engage in cultural practices. Finally, there is a third form which cultural

University of California Press, 1987), especially pp. 17–18.

31 See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), pp. 35–37.

32 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The (Three) Forms of Capital', trans. by Richard Nice, in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241–55.

capital can take: an 'institutionalized state [...] which must be set apart because, as [...] seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee'.[33] Formal acts of accreditation such as educational credentials, recognised posts, university positions, literary prizes, and so on guarantee the social value of cultural capital, by providing symbolic recognition and (more or less indirectly) access to economic remuneration.

Interestingly, the notion of cultural capital finds a precedent in the work of the poet and literary critic Paul Valéry, as Pascale Casanova has shown. Casanova draws attention to a passage from Valéry's 1939 essay 'La liberté de l'esprit' which could almost have been written by Bourdieu:

> De quoi est composé ce capital Culture ou Civilisation ? Il est d'abord constitué par des choses, des objets matériels — livres, tableaux, instruments, etc., qui ont leur durée probable, leur fragilité, leur précarité de choses. Pour que le matériel de la culture soit un capital, il exige [...] l'existence d'hommes qui aient besoin de lui, et qui puissent s'en servir, — c'est-à-dire d'hommes qui aient soif de connaissance et de puissance de transformations intérieures, soif de développements de leur sensibilité et qui sachent, d'autre part, acquérir ou exercer ce qu'il faut d'habitudes, de discipline intellectuelle, de conventions et de pratiques pour utiliser l'arsenal de documents et d'instruments que les siècles ont accumulé.[34]

We know that Bourdieu was familiar with Valéry's œuvre. He cites Valéry in his first article on literature, and on several occasions in *Les Règles* (*RA*, 351; 523). Without claiming Valéry as the source of Bourdieu's

33 'The (Three) Forms of Capital', pp. 243–44.

34 'Of what is this capital called Culture or Civilization composed? It is constituted first by things, material objects—books, paintings, instruments, etc.—which have their own probable duration, their fragility, their precariousness as things. For the material of culture to be capital, it also requires [...] the existence of people who need it and are able to use it—that is, people who thirst for knowledge and for the power of inner transformation, who thirst for the development of their sensibility, and who know how, moreover, to acquire or exercise the habits, intellectual discipline, conventions, and practices needed to use the arsenal of documents and instruments accumulated over the centuries' (trans. J.S.). Paul Valéry, 'La liberté de l'esprit', in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, in *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Hytier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), II, 1077–1106 (p. 1090). The parallel with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is noted by Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 14.

concept of cultural capital, we can nevertheless see him as a surprising and rarely credited precursor: Valéry had already connected cultural objects to the socially acquired needs, habits, disciplines, conventions, and practices required to make use of them.

## The literary field

The next step in Bourdieu's analysis is to plot the positions of writers in the literary field. As we have seen, this space is relatively autonomous from the field of power, enclosing the struggle between writers. However, there are also always degrees of autonomy within the field, and as a result the literary field is divided between two broad groups or subfields. Bourdieu positions, at one pole, writers of bestsellers whose success is measured by the number of copies sold and by the popularity of their works with the public and the media. These writers are described as heteronomous: beholden to influences, norms, or standards external to the field. At the other pole, Bourdieu positions autonomous writers, who respect no judgement other than that of their peers, and for whom too rapid or great commercial success may even be suspicious. Although these writers tend to be less successful in commercial terms (especially at the early stages of their careers), they receive the specific profits or symbolic capital bestowed by the field (literary prizes, publications with a prestigious publishing house, favourable reviews in specialist journals, etc.), through which they can slowly accrue recognition in the wider literary community, and perhaps gain the ultimate consecration from the school and university, by being included in the canon and on the curriculum. There is, then, a relation of *homologie structurale* ('structural homology') between the literary field and the field of power, which is also split between two principles of hierarchy and two competing forms of power (*RP*, 73–74).

As we saw in the case of the field of power, there can be considerable variation across time and national traditions in terms of both the relative power of the poles in the literary field and the form of their opposition. For instance, 'la même *intention d'autonomie*', Bourdieu writes, 'peut en effet s'exprimer dans des prises de position opposées (laïques dans un cas, religieuses dans un autre) selon la structure et l'histoire des pouvoirs

contre lesquels elle doit s'affirmer' (*RA*, 551).[35] Autonomy does not, therefore, necessarily mean the rejection of external rules and values, but can take many, sometimes paradoxical, forms, depending on the particular constraints and pressures operating on and within the field. For example, in their studies of the literary field in Quebec, Denis Saint-Jacques and Alain Viala showed how Québécois writers have come to identify themselves positively with everything that can distinguish them from their more powerful literary and political neighbours, adopting, for instance, motifs from Catholicism in an Anglo-Saxon Protestant milieu, and regionalist themes against the universalist French literary tradition.[36] As Maurice Lemire argues, in a contradictory move Québécois writers submit to the codes and conventions of morality and religion in order to affirm their independence from cultural domination.[37] This example points to a broader problem, to which we will return in Chapter 3: the relational and sometimes paradoxical logic of literary autonomy, whereby practices that appear heteronomous from one standpoint may, from another, function as assertions of independence or as means of securing the conditions of autonomous literary production.

Like the social space as a whole, the literary field also has its dominant and dominated factions. The dominant positions at the autonomous pole are occupied by authors consecrated within the field, whose prestige has begun to extend beyond the restricted circle of their peers to a broader cultivated readership. The dominant positions at the opposite pole are occupied by authors who cater to the dominant faction of the general public. They receive, along with high financial rewards, the benefits of bourgeois consecration (favourable reviews in the bourgeois press, friendships and matrimonial ties, symbols of institutional consecration such as the Légion d'honneur or a seat at the Académie française). Popular writers are doubly discredited: for their mass-market orientation and for addressing a lower-class readership.

35 'The same intention of autonomy can in effect be expressed in opposite position-takings (secular in one case, religious in another) according to the structure and the history of the powers against which it must assert itself' (*Rules*, 343).

36 Denis Saint-Jacques and Alain Viala, 'À propos du champ littéraire : histoire, géographie, histoire littéraire', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu : dettes et critiques*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), pp. 59–74, https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.lahir.2001.01.0059

37 Maurice Lemire, 'L'Autonomisation de la « Littérature Nationale » au XIXe siècle', *Études Littéraires*, 20 (1987), 75–98, https://doi.org/10.7202/500789ar

Opposed to popular writers stands the new avant-garde: writers who challenge the consecrated avant-garde, in the name of the same values of novelty and independence that propelled their forerunners into power—while justifying their own revolution in terms of a lost purity or return to origins. Because of the specialised and experimental nature of their work, these authors usually have few, if any, readers beyond the close circle of their peers. Failed or failing writers, who arrive too late, or stay too long, or whose works fail in their execution, also occupy this dominated position. Indeed, there is often some ambiguity as to who belongs to each of these categories—that is, who is a misunderstood genius or a second-rate talent (*RA*, 358).

In *Les Règles*, Bourdieu represents the French literary field at the end of the nineteenth century visually by means of two sociograms. In his diagram of 'Le champ de production culturelle dans le champ du pouvoir et dans l'espace social' (*RA,* 207), Bourdieu represents French social space as a rectangle traversed by two axes. The vertical axis measures the total volume of both forms of capital. The horizontal axis measures relative amounts of economic and cultural capital. Another box, situated in the upper area of the sociogram, represents the field of power. Within this space, Bourdieu locates the field of cultural production on the left, towards the cultural pole. Within the field of cultural production itself, Bourdieu draws two subfields: the subfield of restricted production, and the subfield of mass production. The other sociogram, 'Le champ littéraire à la fin du XIX$^{e}$ siècle (détail)' (*RA*, 205), provides a close-up map of these two subfields. Bourdieu represents the system of oppositions between literary schools and groups by arrows linking their names, which are placed in the approximate areas of the sociogram corresponding to their positions in the field, defined by the volume and structure of their capitals. Both these sociograms are, however, rather impressionistic. Informed by Bourdieu's other studies of fields, they rely less on quantitative data than on broad knowledge and intuition.

In his other major studies of fields, from his 1976 article (with Monique de Saint Martin) 'Anatomie du goût'[38] to one of his last major studies, 'Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition'[39]—an analysis

38 Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint Martin, 'Anatomie du goût', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2.5 (1976), 2–81, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1976.3471

39 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition', *Actes de la recherche en*

of the French publishing field in the 1990s—but most famously in *La Distinction*, Bourdieu used Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) as a way of plotting large amounts of data graphically and discerning their patterns.[40] Multiple Correspondence Analysis is primarily a technique for representing the rows and columns of a two-way contingency table (such as an Individuals × Properties table) in a joint plot. The result is a cloud of points, which provides a visual representation of the relationships between the row categories and the column categories in the same two-dimensional space. The calculations and visual representation are usually performed using specially designed computer software (in the original draft of *La Distinction*, however, the simultaneous display of the space of individuals and the space of properties was achieved by layering transparent papers). Bourdieu discovered correspondence analysis from the French Data Analysis school led by Jean-Paul Benzécri, around the same time he was developing his concept of field in the late 1960s. Bourdieu speaks of 'l'affinité entre cette méthode d'analyse mathématique et la pensée en termes de champ' (*SSR*, 70).[41] It is, he writes, 'essentially a relational procedure whose philosophy fully expresses what in my view constitutes social reality. It is a procedure that "thinks" in relations, as I try to do it with the concept of field'.[42]

Multiple Correspondence Analysis has often been used by researchers working in a broadly Bourdieusian framework, and has been applied in empirical investigations of literary fields by Jürgen Gerhards and Helmut Anheier, as well as by Gisèle Sapiro.[43] Gerhards and Anheier used MCA to test Bourdieu's description of the literary field

*sciences sociales*, 126–27 (1999), 3–28, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1999.3278

40 In this discussion of Bourdieu's use of correspondence analysis, I rely on Henry Rouanet, Werner Ackermann, and Brigitte Le Roux, 'The Geometric Analysis of Questionnaires: The Lesson of Bourdieu's *La Distinction*', *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 65.1 (2000), 5–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/075910630006500103; and Dianne Phillips, 'Correspondence Analysis', *Social Research Update*, 7 (1995), http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU7.html

41 'The affinity between that method of mathematical analysis and thinking in terms of fields' (*Science*, 33).

42 Cited and translated by Henry Rouanet et al., 'The Geometric Analysis of Questionnaires', p. 8.

43 Jürgen Gerhards and Helmut K. Anheier, 'The Literary Field: An Empirical Investigation of Bourdieu's Sociology of Art', *International Sociology*, 4.2 (1989), 131–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/026858089004002002; Gisèle Sapiro, 'La raison littéraire : le champ littéraire français sous l'Occupation (1940–1944)', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 111–12 (1996), 3–35, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1996.3166

as a relatively autonomous and internally differentiated and stratified social system, in the case of writers in Cologne. Data for the analysis and interpretation were collected via interviews with Cologne writers, conducted with the help of a semi-standardised questionnaire. The authors studied variables such as level of familiarity with the literary work of their colleagues, frequency of informal relationships with other writers, level of assistance received from colleagues preparing manuscripts and establishing contact with publishers, and reference group orientation (measured by whom they would most like to invite to dinner). The authors also collected data on educational level, membership of literary groups or societies, age, and number of books published. This information was then plotted and analysed using MCA and blockmodel analysis (another mode of statistical analysis). The authors conclude that, indeed, the literary field in Cologne is divided between "legitimate" (autonomous) and "illegitimate" (heteronomous) groups, and between the elite and the junior elite (or the old and new avant-gardes), plus writers on the periphery. One frequent criticism of statistical analyses, of course, is that they expend a great deal of time and energy but yield relatively modest interpretative returns.

Sapiro's article shows how MCA can be used to support, and can even suggest, less expected hypotheses. In her study of 'Le champ littéraire sous l'Occupation (1940–1944)', Sapiro shows that writers whose positions in the literary field relied on the esteem of their peers (i.e., symbolic capital) were also the most likely to resist the German Occupation, while those writers who were more open to heteronomous definitions of literary success (in particular, the sanction of the market) were more likely to collaborate with the Occupation. Not only were autonomous writers already adapted, in a way, to clandestine activity, which hardly changed their conditions of production (limited print runs, restricted readership, low remuneration, etc.); they also formed a relatively self-sufficient and close-knit community, oriented by a shared system of values that they collectively supported and reinforced, without the need for outside approval or legitimation.[44] Sapiro's analysis supports Bourdieu's hypothesis in *Les Règles* that it is an author's position in the literary field which determines their position-takings, not only in

44 Sapiro, 'La raison littéraire', p. 18.

the literary field but in the political sphere as well. This finding reverses the more usual assumption that literary writing reflects or expresses political allegiances and convictions (*RA*, 379–80).

The strong association between MCA and Bourdieusian analysis is likely to be a barrier to literary scholars, who, at least in the current division of academic skills and labour, are unlikely to possess the technical competence required to perform statistical analysis. Yet even Bourdieu did not always do his own data analysis; he collaborated, for this purpose, with statisticians including Brigitte Le Roux, Rosine Christin, Alain Darbel, and Salah Bouhedja. Here is an opportunity, then, for interdisciplinary collaboration. It is also worth remembering that Bourdieu himself does not use MCA in *Les Règles* but instead relies on discursive indicators, such as first-hand accounts (in letters and journals), reviews, literary history, and criticism, and so on. Indeed, literary scholars may be more practised and skilled in this sort of archival work and close reading than sociologists.

The notion of a literary field finds a parallel in the literary tradition with the notion of a Republic of Letters, used since the seventeenth century to designate the community of intellectuals and writers. Bourdieu finds many of the properties of the literary field already captured by this notion, as described by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706): the battle of all against all, the closure of the field upon itself, the freedom encouraged by the field, and so on. Bourdieu argues, however, that this notion has never served as the basis of a rigorous analysis, and warns that, in focusing on the superficial similarities (based on 'une véritable homologie structurale')[45] between the literary and political fields, it risks reducing literary struggles to the struggle for social power, without recognising the specific profits and interests in the field (*RA*, 337–38).

Bourdieu also argues against replacing the notion of field with that of a literary institution, which he claims gives 'une image consensuelle d'un univers très conflictuel'[46] and loses sight of one of the most significant characteristics of the literary field, which is its '*faible degré d'institutionnalisation*' (*RA*, 379 n. 21).[47] The French literary field has no formal qualifications for entry (such as educational credentials or entry

45 'a true structural homology' (*Rules*, 204).
46 'a consensual image of a very conflictual universe' (*Rules*, 382).
47 '*weak degree of institutionalization*' (*Rules*, 382).

tests), no universally recognised instance of institutional consecration nor arbitration, and few formalised prescriptions for the role or post of the writer. Indeed, idiosyncrasy and rebelliousness are encouraged (*RA*, 370–71). For similar reasons, Bourdieu finds the concept of field more apt than Louis Althusser's notion of an ideological state apparatus (ISA), which would impose certain beliefs, values, and practices. According to Bourdieu, 'un champ devient un appareil lorsque les dominants ont les moyens d'annuler la résistance et les réactions des dominés' (*QS*, 136).[48] From this perspective, the French literary field would appear very unlike an ISA, because it has, since the nineteenth century, been the site of a permanent revolution, in which a new avant-garde is established every ten or twelve years. Finally, Bourdieu distinguishes his notion of cultural fields from that of Howard Becker's art world, which he defines as 'consisting of all those people and organizations whose activity is necessary to produce the kind of events and objects which that world characteristically produces'.[49] In Bourdieu's reading, Becker's concept reduces relations to direct interactions and gives a rather irenic vision of a social field rife with symbolic violence and competition (*RA*, 338–39).

Bernard Lahire warns us, however, that 'tout contexte pertinent d'activité n'est pas un champ'.[50] There may be situations in which groupings are more ephemeral, more chaotic, or less clearly organised around a unifying problematic than the notion of field implies. In such circumstances, terms such as "grouping", "milieu", or "space" may be more appropriate. The term "grouping", for example, may be better for fragile and short-lived micro-structures, while "space" could be used to describe the macro-relations between more dispersed and disparate groups. Lahire notes that writers, who are often obliged to earn their living from other employment, are also more like players who regularly enter and leave the game than stable agents in a field. For this reason, Lahire prefers to speak of a *jeu littéraire* ('literary game') in his

48 'a field becomes an apparatus when the dominant are able to suppress any resistance or reaction from the dominated' (trans. J.S.).

49 Howard Becker, 'Art as Collective Action', *American Sociological Review*, 39.6 (1974), 767–76 (p. 774), https://doi.org/10.2307/2094151

50 'Not every pertinent context is a field' (trans. J.S.). Bernard Lahire, 'Champ, hors-champ, contrechamp', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), pp. 23–57 (p. 32).

book *La Condition littéraire: la double vie des écrivains* (2006).[51] Bourdieu himself switches disconcertingly between the terms *champ* ('field'), *espace* ('space'), and *univers* ('universe'), and also refers to a *marché des biens symboliques* ('market of symbolic goods')—without ever really explaining their differences. The point, no doubt, is to encourage his readers to 'think relationally' (*IRS*, 63), and remember that our apparent object (for example, a particular writer or group of writers) is always caught in a much wider web of relationships. Bourdieu's use of near synonyms can be confusing, however, especially alongside his strong insistence that the concept of field cannot be replaced with the notions of a Republic of Letters, literary institution, or art world (all of which he also sometimes uses).

An important question concerns the limits of the field, or the population to be studied. 'C'est déjà exister dans un champ', Bourdieu writes, 'que d'y produire des effets, fût-ce de simples réactions de résistance ou d'exclusion' (*RA*, 369–70).[52] Jeremy Lane finds this explanation unconvincing, however, as it seems to beg the question: 'In order to know which agents produce effects in a given field, it would be necessary to know in advance the boundaries of that field, otherwise it would not be possible to assess whether particular agents were producing effects within or beyond its boundaries'.[53] Yet Bourdieu insisted on the need to acknowledge and explain the competing definitions of the field's boundaries, which remain in a perpetual state of indeterminacy (*flou*). Who is in and who is out is both constantly evolving and a matter of controversy, and the model should be able to account for this change and ambiguity (*RA*, 365).

Anna Boschetti criticises Bourdieu for naturalising the concept of field, which is only a theoretical tool. According to Boschetti, Bourdieu makes the same reifying move 'du modèle de la réalité à la réalité du modèle' (*SP*, 67)[54] for which he criticises Lévi-Strauss and Marxism.

51 Bernard Lahire, *La condition littéraire : la double vie des écrivains* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.lahir.2006.01. See also Bernard Lahire, 'Le champ et le jeu : la spécificité de l'univers littéraire en question', in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2010), pp. 143–72.

52 'To produce effects is already to exist in a field, even if these effects are mere reactions of resistance or exclusion' (*Rules*, 225).

53 Jeremy Lane, *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 89–90, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203013571

54 'the model of reality to the reality of the model' (*Logic*, 39).

Bourdieu finds this error behind both Lévi-Strauss's rigidly rule-bound structuralism, which leaves little room for agency, and the Marxist confusion of classes-on-paper for actually mobilised and self-conscious classes. According to Boschetti, Bourdieu himself makes a similar mistake by thinking that the literary field exists as a real object. 'It would be better and simpler', Boschetti proposes, 'to wonder if in our object there are aspects that could be explained using Field Theory'.[55] Yet if Boschetti's solution avoids the reifying move from the model of reality to the reality of the model, it risks tipping into the opposite error of conventionalism—which, as Frédéric Vandenberghe has shown, is probably the stronger tendency in Bourdieu.

Indeed, we might side with Vandenberghe on this issue and argue that 'a theory has to be ontologically bold rather than epistemologically cautious'. Researchers need to make a commitment to the realism of their models; otherwise, the referential relation between the model and reality becomes, in Vandenberghe's words, 'ontologically obscure'.[56] As an alternative, Vandenberghe refers to the British philosopher Roy Bhaskar,[57] whose critical realism keeps a clear concept of independent reality alongside the historicity and relativity of knowledge.[58] In other words, we can claim that something like a field objectively exists, without insisting either that it is an unconscious mechanism or that its agents are fully or continuously aware of their involvement in the system. Needless to say, Bourdieu contested the charge of conventionalism, and in a reply to Vandenberghe's article claimed that, like Bhaskar (whose work he had read only recently), he had been a realist all along. Notwithstanding Bourdieu's protest, Boschetti's criticism of Bourdieu's apparent naturalisation of the notion of field and Vandenberghe's opposite judgement that '(at worst) he reduces ontology to epistemology and (at best) he avoids making ontological commitments by resorting to a conventionalist [...] "philosophy of the as if"' raise a complex

55 Anna Boschetti, 'How Field Theory Can Contribute to the Knowledge of the World Literary Space', unpublished paper given on 16 May 2009 at the *Bourdieu and Literature* conference, University of Warwick.

56 Vandenberghe, 'The Real is Relational', pp. 32–67.

57 See, e.g., Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1975); and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

58 See Vandenberghe, '"The Real is Relational"', p. 62 n. 55.

point in Bourdieu's theory of sociological knowledge. As we will see, this problem also bears on Bourdieu's conception of the relation and difference between science and fiction—a point to which we will return in Chapter 4.

## Habitus and trajectory

The third stage of Bourdieu's method traces the trajectory of writers through the literary field and within the field of power. For Bourdieu, this is how we are to explain the successes and failures, both literary and social, that comprise an author's career—rather than attributing them to natural talent, pure intention, or strength of will. Indeed, Bourdieu is dismissive of ordinary biographical attempts to make sense of a writer's career in terms of the individual alone. He declares:

> Essayer de comprendre une vie comme une série unique et à soi suffisante d'événements successifs sans autre lien que l'association à un « sujet » dont la constance n'est sans doute que celle d'un nom propre est à peu près aussi absurde que d'essayer de rendre raison d'un trajet dans le métro sans prendre en compte la structure du réseau, c'est-à-dire la matrice des relations objectives entre les différentes stations (*RA*, 426).[59]

Yet this is not to say that there is no continuity across an individual's actions, or that they are wholly determined by social forces. According to Bourdieu, we internalise the information inscribed in our social surroundings, beginning at an early age. Indeed, the first field is, for Bourdieu, the family, which has its own physical, economic, and symbolic power relations, measured in terms of affection, trust, age, and so on (all of which are, of course, strongly determined by social class).[60] It is in the family that we first gain a sense of who we are and where we belong: a stage at which, Bourdieu suggests, sociology could usefully be brought into dialogue with psychoanalysis (*MP*, 199). The

59 'Trying to understand a career or a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events without another link than the association with a "subject" (whose consistency is perhaps only that of a socially recognized proper name) is almost as absurd as trying to make sense of a trip on the metro without taking the structure of the network into account, meaning the matrix of objective relations between the different stations' (*Rules*, 258–59).

60 Pierre Bourdieu, 'À propos de la famille comme catégorie réalisée', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 100 (1993), 32–36, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1993.3070

process of socialisation continues through various rites of initiation and institution, from the most obvious (a qualification, a promotion, a marriage) to the slightest (a snub or a sign of appreciation), whereby, as if following a path of least resistance (which is not to say without anxiety and uncertainty, which form part of the process of investiture), we submit willingly to our destiny: doing and being what our families, institutions, society, and we ourselves expect of us (*MP*, 198–99).

This mode of being and acting in the world is termed the 'habitus' by Bourdieu. The habitus is both structured—shaped by the objective conditions of one's upbringing—and structuring, in that it actively produces strategies, preferences, and expectations that tend to reproduce those very conditions over time. Rather than functioning as a set of explicit rules, the habitus operates below the level of conscious calculation, generating practices that are, in most cases, experienced as natural, self-evident, or simply the way things are done. In this sense, it provides the principle of continuity across an individual's actions, without reducing them to mechanical effects of external structures or requiring us to posit a fully sovereign, self-transparent subject standing outside the social world. Habitus names, instead, the embodied mediation between structure and practice, where each is continuously converted into the other: structure into disposition, and disposition into practice.

In *Les Règles*, Bourdieu applies to cultural producers the theory of habitus he had developed through his earlier studies of education, museum attendance, and cultural consumption, most famously in *La Distinction*. In *La Distinction*, he argues that agents often come to reject goods, groups, places, and practices that are not in keeping with the lifestyle associated with their social position, and that this exclusion cannot be reduced to economic cost alone. Entry to many museums, for example, is free, while many items of clothing associated with the lower classes cost more than those worn by the middle and even upper classes. In much the same way, a writer's sense of social identity helps determine which genres, groups, and positions they are drawn to within the literary field, and therefore their subsequent position-takings. The conditions of existence associated with high birth, for instance, tend to favour dispositions such as audacity and indifference to profit, which orient writers from richer backgrounds towards the most extreme and

risky positions: those that exceed current demand, but may also prove the most profitable symbolically and, in the long run, even economically (*RA*, 430).

Writers also need to be in tune, however, with the latest developments in the field: to have what Bourdieu calls a *sens du placement* ('sense of placement') or *sens du jeu* ('feel for the game'), which enables them to anticipate which position-takings will earn them symbolic and economic profit, rather than simply recognising where such profit is currently to be found. This feel for the literary game, Bourdieu writes, 'semble être une des dispositions les plus étroitement liées à l'origine sociale et géographique' (*RA*, 430).[61] Writers who have been immersed in literary culture, especially from an early age, internalise not only the sounds and rhythms of prose and poetry, but also a sense for the rhythm of the field: a quasi-instinctual awareness that, when positions are becoming too popular or too established, they should move on or attempt something new. Bourdieu writes:

> À l'inverse, c'est un mauvais sens du placement, lié à l'éloignement social ou géographique, qui incite les écrivains issus des classes populaires ou de la petite bourgeoisie et les provinciaux ou les étrangers à se porter vers les positions dominantes au moment où les profits qu'elles assurent tendent à diminuer du fait même de l'attraction qu'elles exercent [...] et de la concurrence intensifiée dont elles sont le lieu (*RA*, 431).[62]

The habitus thus guides the writer's trajectory through the structured space of the field. Bourdieu identifies two main families of trajectories within the literary field. The first is limited to one sector of the field (autonomous or heteronomous), and lies along the same axis of consecration, moving from negative, through zero, to positive. These are descending, static, or ascendant trajectories, measurable in terms of the accumulation or loss of cultural or economic capital. The second type of trajectory involves a change of sector, and the conversion of

61 'seems to be one of the dispositions most closely linked to social and geographical origin' (*Rules*, 262).

62 'Conversely, it is a bad sense of placement/investment, linked with social or geographic distance, which sends writers from the working class or the petite bourgeoisie, provincials or foreigners, towards the dominant positions at the moment when the profits they provide tend to be diminishing due to the very attraction they exercise [...] and due to the intensified competition focused on them' (*Rules*, 262).

one form of capital into another. For example, cultural capital can be converted into economic capital when literary prestige or skill gained in poetry is redirected toward more profitable forms such as theatre, cabaret, or serialised fiction (*FCP*, 65 n. 44; *RA*, 426–27). Bourdieu also distinguishes several categories of trajectories from various social backgrounds into the literary field: directly ascendant from the popular classes or lower middle class; diagonal from the petite bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and artisans, or the peasantry; transversal or horizontal (but in a sense declining) from the economic side of the field of power or from its central positions (the professions, including lawyers and doctors). Finally, there are cases of pure reproduction, when the children of writers become writers as well (from Kingsley Amis to Martin Amis): 'déplacements nuls' (*RA*, 247).[63]

## The space of works

It should already be obvious that Bourdieu also sees literary texts themselves as position-takings in the field, as writers associate themselves with genres in much the same way as they associate with one another. Bourdieu sees this theory of a homology between the "space of positions" in the social field and the system of differences in the "space of works" as a way of overcoming the problematic opposition between internal and external levels of analysis. Either the work is treated for itself and in itself (or, as in the case of the Russian Formalists, as a node within a system of related intertexts), cut off from any biographical or historical context; or it is read as a sort of allegory for the social or biographical context. Critics may also ignore the question entirely and switch incoherently between the two approaches. In contrast, Bourdieu reads intertextual differences as expressions of the social relations between authors—making the history of changes in the space of works and that of the alliances and rivalries between writers, in words Bourdieu borrows from Baruch Spinoza, 'deux versions de la même phrase'.[64]

63 'nil displacements' (*Rules*, 260).

64 'Two versions of the same phrase' (trans. J.S.). Claud DuVerlie and Pierre Bourdieu, 'Esquisse d'un projet intellectuel : un entretien avec Pierre Bourdieu', *The French Review*, 61.2 (1987), 194–205 (p. 204).

Bourdieu maintains a distinction between these two levels of analysis—the space of positions and the space of works—each of which provides information about the other. Microtextual and macrosocial analysis are thus linked in a kind of hermeneutic circle, though this is not Bourdieu's term: the individual text, situated within the space of works, is interpreted in relation to the author's position in the literary field and the field of power, while that position is itself clarified by the formal and stylistic features of the text. Analysis proceeds through this 'va-et-vient' between the two spaces. Bourdieu writes:

> Armée de l'hypothèse de l'homologie entre les deux structures, la recherche peut, en instaurant un va-et-vient entre les deux espaces et entre les informations identiques qui s'y trouvent proposées sous des apparences différentes, cumuler l'information que livrent à la fois les œuvres lues dans leurs interrelations et les propriétés des agents, ou de leurs positions, elles aussi appréhendées dans leurs relations objectives: telle stratégie stylistique peut ainsi fournir le point de départ d'une recherche sur la trajectoire de son auteur et telle information biographique inciter à lire autrement telle particularité formelle de l'œuvre ou telle propriété de sa structure (*RA*, 383).[65]

Bourdieu insists that the relation between these two structures is neither direct nor mechanical. Between the two lies *l'espace des possibles* ('space of possibilities'), which we can think of as including potential courses of action and works that were never in fact realised. Bourdieu describes the space of possibilities as 'un espace orienté et gros des prises de position qui s'y annoncent comme des potentialités objectives, des choses "à faire", "mouvements" à lancer, revues à créer, adversaires à combattre, prises de position établies à "dépasser", etc.' (*RA*, 384).[66] The analyst's task is then to comprehend the writer's work as a sort of compromise

65 'Equipped with the hypothesis of a homology between the two structures, research—by setting up a to-and-fro between the two spaces and between identical data offered there under different guises—may accumulate the information which delivers works read *at the same time* in their interrelations, and the properties of agents, or their positions, also apprehended in their objective relations. A stylistic strategy of this sort may thus furnish the starting point for a search for the author's trajectory, or some piece of biographical information may incite us to read differently some formal particularity of the work or such a property of the structure' (*Rules*, 234; trans. modified J.S.).

66 'things "to be done", "movements" to launch, reviews to create, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be "overtaken" and so forth' (*Rules*, 235).

formation (a phrase borrowed from Freud), produced by a unique configuration of social forces and relations coupled with the author's dispositions.

Bourdieu takes issue on this point with Russian Formalism, and also with Michel Foucault's theory of *épistème* (*RA*, 326). In his 1968 article 'Réponse au Cercle d'épistémologie',[67] Foucault insists on the 'existence indépendante'[68] of the 'champ des possibilités stratégiques',[69] and, taking the case of science, condemns as an 'illusion doxologique'[70] any attempt to explain what is produced within that field by reference to anything other than 'des points de choix qu'il laisse libre à partir d'un champ d'objets donnés, à partir d'une gamme énonciative déterminée, à partir d'un jeu de concepts définis dans leur contenu et dans leur usage'.[71] Indeed, in what may be one of the few intertextual references to Bourdieu in Foucault's work, Foucault explicitly excludes all attempts to relate scientific systems (whether biology, economics, or linguistics) 'aux divergences d'intérêts ou d'habitudes mentales chez les individus',[72] or to 'du non-scientifique (du psychologique, du politique, du social, du religieux)'.[73] Bourdieu, who at the time had been formulating his theory of habitus, admitted to feeling targeted (*RA*, 326).

Likewise, Bourdieu criticises Russian Formalist attempts to explain changes in the literary system in terms of a dialectic of banalisation and debanalisation (*ostranenie*), which would appear to operate under its own impetus. Similarly to Foucault, in Bourdieu's account Russian Formalism neglects the social dimension, or conflates the space of works and the field of producers. Bourdieu finds this confusion exemplified by the ambiguity of the Russian Formalists' notion of *ustanovka*, which can mean either intention or orientation (*RA*, 333).[74] It is unclear who—or

67 Michel Foucault, 'Réponse au Cercle d'épistémologie', in *Dits et Écrits 1954–1988*, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, with the collaboration of Jacques Lagrange, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), I, 696–731 (first published in *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, 9 (1968), 9–40). The quotations that follow are from p. 727.

68 'independent existence' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

69 'field of strategic possibilities' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

70 'doxic illusion' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

71 'the points of choice that it leaves open within a given field of objects, within a determined range of enunciations, and within a play of concepts defined in their content and usage' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

72 'to the diverging interests or mental habits of individuals' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

73 'the non-scientific (psychology, politics, the social, the religious)' (trans. J.S.). Ibid.

74 Bourdieu's reference is to Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca,

what—the subject or agent of this process is, and change thus seems to be attributed to a strange capacity for autotransformation within the literary system itself.

Bourdieu, in contrast, locates the impetus behind the evolution of the space of works squarely in the dynamic relations and struggles between writers in the field. For Bourdieu, there is nothing mechanical about this process. It is not driven by the exhaustion of existing modes of expression, which then prompts the invention of new forms. Rather, it is driven by the influx of new writers with socially determined characteristics, seeking to define themselves in relation both to one another and to writers of the previous generation.

There is also a homology between the space of writers (and the space of works) and their audiences. For instance, new avant-gardes can draw support from new categories of consumers who occupy homologous positions in the social field, and whose interests are defined against social groups associated with the consecrated avant-garde or the commercial pole. It follows that a change in the relations of force between readers (the most dramatic example being a political revolution) can also affect the balance of power in the literary field. Bourdieu gives the example of the last years of the July Monarchy, when the swing towards the socialist left gave provisional weight to social art. Even Baudelaire spoke of the 'puérile utopie de *l'art pour l'art*', which slid into a dominated third position (*RA*, 102). Similarly, rising literacy can strengthen the market for so-called intellectual literature, as larger numbers of people take part in cultural practices corresponding to their more educated social status (*RA*, 416–18 n. 58).

Yet Bourdieu resists the temptation to draw a direct connection between external changes—political revolutions, technical innovations, epidemics, educational reforms, economic crises—and the production of works. Here, he crosses swords with Marxist literary theorists such as György Lukács and Lucien Goldmann, who, in his view, produce a kind of short-circuit between the social field and the literary field (*RP*, 67). Marxist critics, Bourdieu argues, attempt to relate works, and changes in the space of works, directly to the social class and political beliefs of their authors, their readers, or both, treating literary works as

NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 124.

expressions of collective worldviews. Such theories therefore commit an error equal and opposite to that of Foucault and the Russian Formalists: they lose sight of the literary field as a relatively autonomous world apart, governed by its own norms and mediations.

Bourdieu offers the metaphor of refraction to counter the theory of reflection or mirroring of reality that he sees behind Marxist theories. For example, it is too simplistic, Bourdieu argues, to relate the depictions of rustic and petit-bourgeois life in the works of nineteenth-century realist writers and artists such as Jules Champfleury and Gustave Courbet directly to their social origin in the peasantry and petite bourgeoisie. The dispositions that led them to embrace everything that could define them against the bourgeois artists they opposed both socially and politically might have been expressed entirely differently in another historical state of the field (*RA*, 436). Their oppositional stance was thus refracted through the prism of the literary field and the possibilities for literary expression it presented. The effect of refraction is clearest, however, according to Bourdieu, when bankers, businesspeople, or politicians turn their hands to writing, and are obliged to give at least lip service to the field's official norms—for example, by avoiding the crudest forms of self-publicity, professing a love of art, modifying their usual discourses by adopting certain stock themes, and paying at least minimal attention to form (*RA*, 362).

It is worth pausing to notice Bourdieu's use of other theorists as tools to think with and against. Bourdieu explores the various positions in the field of criticism, tries to identify their background assumptions, or what he calls their 'principes fondateurs explicites ou implicites' (*RA*, 319),[75] and attempts to overcome their apparent contradictions. Yet this procedure can lead to reductionist and misleading portrayals of other theorists.[76] Foucault's 1968 essay from his early structuralist phase, for example, is unlikely to be the most interesting or useful point of reference for literary scholars. Foucault's later genealogical model, in which discourse analysis is linked to a theory of power/

75 'explicit or implicit founding principles' (*Rules*, 193).

76 Here I am transposing to the field of literary theory a critique first made of Bourdieu's readings of the field of social theory in Rogers Brubaker, 'Social Theory as Habitus', in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp. 212–34.

knowledge and implicated in a ubiquitous network of power relations, would seem a more relevant comparison.[77] Similarly, Marxist theorists had already, by the 1970s, rejected the conception of literature as 'a material reflection [...] of objective reality', and begun themselves to speak about relative autonomy and refraction.[78] Jean-Louis Fabiani's comment that 'la référence aux études littéraires n'existe que pour faire valoir l'originalité et la puissance théorique de la sociologie de l'auteur' is probably unfair.[79] Bourdieu is not simply referring to other modes of literary analysis to display the superiority of sociology, but using other theories as materials with which to construct his own position. But his instrumental use of other theories does at times do them injustice, while he ignores others that do not fit his purpose. Bourdieu seems to anticipate these complaints, and begs his readers' indulgence for these compressed summaries, as well as for not providing full references and citations to support his arguments (*RA,* 319). However, his lack of generosity towards rival approaches can make that indulgence harder to grant.

Finally, we can see how Bourdieu responds to the challenges laid down by Flaubert and Valéry to understand the composition and style of the work from the author's point of view. By mentally identifying with the author's position, and in the light of their social origin and trajectory, we should be able to see 'ce qui rend l'œuvre d'art *nécessaire*, c'est-à-dire la formule informatrice, le principe générateur' (*RA*, 15),[80] understood as the basic pattern of action provided by the writer's habitus, expressed through the grammar of the space of possibilities. It is not difficult to understand why this stage of Bourdieu's analysis has so rarely been repeated. For one thing, as Bourdieu himself admits, it seems to demand an enormous amount of work:

77 See Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003071464

78 See Étienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, 'On Literature as an Ideological Form', in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader,* ed. by Robert J. C. Young (Boston: Routledge, 1981), pp. 79–99.

79 'The reference to literary studies is only there to show off the originality and theoretical power of the author's sociology' (trans. J.S.). Jean-Louis Fabiani, 'Les règles du champ', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), pp. 75–91 (p. 82).

80 'what makes the work of art *necessary,* that is to say, its informing formula, its generative principle' (*Rules,* xix).

> que l'on fasse tout ce que font les adeptes de chacune des méthodes connues (lecture interne, analyse biographique, etc.), en général à l'échelle d'un seul auteur, et tout ce qu'il faut faire pour construire réellement le champ des œuvres et le champ des producteurs et le système des relations qui s'établissent entre ces deux ensembles de relations' (*CD*, 176).[81]

In practice, Bourdieu himself only sketches the broad outlines of these two spaces in his analysis of Flaubert and the field of his contemporaries: offering only the fathers' professions as markers of social origin and characterising the different genres and schools according to very generic properties. Nor, if we follow Bourdieu's lead, do we need to reconstruct these spaces from primary materials alone. Bourdieu also relies heavily on the accumulated work of literary historians, biographers, critics, and editors, whose classifications, chronologies, and accounts of schools, movements, rivalries, and reputations provide much of the scaffolding for his own analysis. This does not remove the need for sociological reconstruction, since such secondary sources must themselves be treated as situated representations of the field rather than as neutral descriptions. But it does suggest that a Bourdieusian analysis need not begin by assembling the entire literary field anew from archival evidence. It can instead work reflexively with the materials already produced by literary scholarship, provided these are reinserted into the wider space of positions, position-takings, and struggles they help to describe.

Bourdieu seems to have chosen particularly favourable objects for this form of analysis, in Flaubert and *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Flaubert provides a voluminous correspondence, in which he shows a high level of self-awareness, commenting explicitly on his attempts to keep his distance from contemporaries and immediate precursors. In *L'Éducation sentimentale*, moreover, he offers a very accurate and even quasi-sociological depiction of the nineteenth-century social world in which the novel was written, including an objectification of his own social position through the character of Frédéric, who is a sort of alter ego (*RA,* 57). Indeed, John Guillory finds Bourdieu's choice of *L'Éducation*

81 'that one do everything done by the adepts of each of the known methods (internal reading, biographical analysis, etc.), usually at the level of a single author, as well as everything that must be done actually to construct the field of works and the field of producers and the system of relations established between these two sets of relations' (*Other Words*, 196; trans. modified J.S.).

*sentimentale* 'altogether too fitting, which is to say that it lends itself too easily to Bourdieusian analysis'.[82] Certainly, Bourdieu's analysis reverses his more usual strategy of arguing *a fortiori* (i.e., choosing the least favourable example by which to establish a general principle), and places a question mark over the more general applicability of his method. As it stands, the proven link between internal and external analysis of the space of works and space of positions remains weak. It is left to later literary researchers to test whether other authors and works are amenable to this method of analysis.

## World literary space

Having reached the end of the method Bourdieu outlines in *Les Règles de l'art*, it may be useful to look in some detail at a major extension of Bourdieu's theory to the transnational level of world literary space. In the context of cultural studies, translation studies, world-system theories, and postcolonial studies, Bourdieu's theory seemed to leave underdeveloped the question of how literary cultures relate to and influence each other. A tentative first attempt to engage with these issues was Bourdieu's 1985 article 'Existe-t-il une littérature belge ? Limites d'un champ et frontières politiques'.[83] Bourdieu studied the relations between the French and Belgian literary fields and arrived at the controversial conclusion that a Belgian literary field did not, in fact, exist. Arguing that the boundaries between political and literary spaces do not necessarily correspond, Bourdieu claimed that Belgian literature was almost entirely dominated by Parisian literary fashions, and that so-called Belgian literature was, in reality, merely a subfield of the encompassing French literary field. In a later interview with Jacques Dubois, Bourdieu admitted he had 'beaucoup accentué'[84] the influence exerted by French literature on Belgian literature, and underestimated Belgian literature's power of resistance.[85] In light of further work by

82 John Guillory, 'Bourdieu's Refusal', in *Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, ed. by Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), pp. 19–43 (p. 34).

83 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Existe-t-il une littérature belge ? Limites d'un champ et frontières politiques', *Études de lettres*, 4 (1985), 3–6, https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-870582

84 'greatly overemphasised' (trans. J.S.).

85 Jacques Dubois and Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ littéraire et rapports de domination : un

Pascale Casanova and others, he came to see Brussels as a counterpower to Paris, the dominant literary centre, while Belgian writers also came to serve as role models for Irish, Norwegian, and other writers from small nations similarly dominated by more powerful neighbours.

It was, in fact, Casanova who most notably developed a theory of world literary space that could be coupled with Bourdieu's theory, in her 1999 publication *La République mondiale des lettres*. Casanova's conception of world literary space builds explicitly on Bourdieu's theory of fields, but also transposes Fernand Braudel's notion of an *économie-monde* ('economy-world') to the literary realm. Like the literary field in its relationship with the field of power at the national scale, world literary space is relatively independent of geoeconomics and geopolitics. It has its own centres and peripheries, its own forms of capital, its own mechanisms of consecration, and its own history of struggles over literary legitimacy. The notion of world literary space is useful for understanding more precisely the influence one national literary culture can exert over another, and the disparities between them in terms of prestige and the power of consecration. As Casanova attempts to show in case studies of Franz Kafka, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett, the relations of power between different national fields can also shape individual writers' perceptions of their own positions, and thus their position-takings.

Casanova suggests using the cultural indicators devised by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson and discussed above to compare literary practices in various countries and their respective stocks of literary capital. To the number of books published each year, time spent reading per inhabitant, and signs of symbolic consecration, Casanova adds the number of translations of books from a particular language. She even proposes the creation of an index or measure of the strictly literary power and authority of a language and literary tradition. Yet Casanova makes no attempt to construct such an index herself, and her own book in general contains little quantitative data. In practice, much of the evidence in *La République mondiale des lettres* is anecdotal and intuitive: based less on hard data than on subjective impressions and accounts. Nonetheless, in a social universe where so much depends on opinion and belief ('nous

entretien de Jacques Dubois avec Pierre Bourdieu', *Textyles*, 15 (1999), 12–16 (p. 13).

sommes', writes Valéry, 'ce que nous croyons être et ce que l'on croit que nous sommes'),[86] this may be less of a problem than it appears.

More conspicuous is the absence of China and the Soviet Union from Casanova's account of literature in the twentieth century. How did these competing spheres of cultural influence, centred on Beijing and Moscow, contribute to structuring world literary space?[87] Nor does Casanova's book have much to say about the international circulation of texts (the processes of selection and capital accumulation, and the ways in which national provenance, translation, changes of publisher, and so on determine reception), beyond noting that the careers of writers including James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, and Anthony Burgess were launched by their publication in Paris. The link Casanova posits between writers' position-takings and the structure of world literary space is also tenuous, as it must be filtered through so many mediations (the national field of power and literary field, and the writers' social histories). This weakness is most serious in Casanova's textual analysis, which is never really able to connect the internal structure and properties of texts to macro-level determinations. Many of these problems relate to the scale of the endeavour. In a work that aims to provide nothing less than a radical remapping of world literary space, simplifications and omissions are inevitable. It is telling that in a later article Casanova suggested that a transnational literary history would require a collective research effort.[88] Researchers applying a similar method could more easily divide their labour and integrate their results, allowing for greater complexity and detail than Casanova achieves in her single-authored study.

This collective work is ongoing. Researchers applying Bourdieu's concepts and theories have studied the literary fields in Québec, South Africa, China, and Germany, and particular authors such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Samuel Beckett, and Jorge Luis Borges.[89]

86 'We are what we believe ourselves to be and what others believe we are' (trans. J.S.). Paul Valéry, 'Fonction et mystère de l'Académie', in *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Hytier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), II, 1119–27 (p. 1120).

87 Here I follow and build on suggestions by Joe Cleary, in 'Review: The World Literary System: Atlas and Epitaph', *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006), 196–219.

88 Pascale Casanova, 'La littérature européenne : juste un degré supérieur d'universalité ?', in *L'Espace intellectuel en Europe : de la formation des États-nations à la mondialisation XIXe–XXIe siècle*, ed. by Gisèle Sapiro (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), pp. 233–47 (p. 234 n. 2), https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.sapir.2009.01.0233

89 See Anna Boschetti, 'Bourdieu's Work on Literature: Contexts, Stakes and

As Bourdieu explained to an audience in Japan in 1989, the fact that his theory is transposable to different national traditions does not mean it loses sight of the particularities and differences between cultures. What Bourdieu proposes is a 'comparatisme de l'essentiel' (*RP*, 29),[90] which would reveal the basic principles and mechanisms common to different literary fields. Testing his theory far from the context in which it was first conceived can help confirm its scientific universality, or reveal gaps and inconsistencies which can then be rectified (*RP,* 29). In this sense, Bourdieu's theory remains a work in progress, which continues to develop in step with the accumulation of empirical knowledge (*RA*, 303).

## Appendix: reflexivity and reading

With increasing insistence from the 1980s onwards, Bourdieu presented his sociology as 'reflexive'—a word that appears in the titles of two of his most theoretical works, *Science de la science et réflexivité* and *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*. For Bourdieu, reflexivity does not mean the reflection on the individual person of the researcher that became fashionable in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly among literary scholars but also among sociologists, and which often resembled journal-writing or autobiography. Instead, it involves examining one's own social universe, its history, structure, and mechanisms, and using what we discover to understand our own habitual processes and responses. This need not take the very explicit form it does in *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, where Bourdieu makes his own trajectory, dispositions, and intellectual formation an overt object of analysis. It can also take the form of an investigation into the fields, institutions, and traditions that have produced both the object and the categories through which it is perceived. When Bourdieu studied his native region of Béarn in *Le Bal des célibataires*, the French system of *grandes écoles* in *La Noblesse d'État*, or even French culture in general in *La Distinction*, he was simultaneously analysing the society and culture of which he was a product and to which he owed his own point of view.

This reflexive return is no less operational in Bourdieu's work

Perspectives', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 23 (2006), 135–55 (p. 147), https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406069779

90 '*comparativism of the essential*' (*Practical Reason*, 13).

on literature. Bourdieu was also part of the intellectual tradition of Flaubert, Zola, and Sartre. Like Marcel Proust excavating lost time and memories, Bourdieu's study of the history of the intellectual field was also partly a work of unforgetting, or anamnesis, digging up his own historical unconscious: the story of how his own position as an intellectual, along with the associated dispositions, categories, concepts, and interests (which he shared with his precursors), as well as the books and institutions that surrounded him, came into being.

Bourdieu believed that this reflexive understanding could provide some measure of control over the patterns of thought and action he and others had internalised from the experience of inhabiting a particular intellectual field and position, and that this would give him *une marge de liberté* ('a margin of liberty') and critical distance from dispositions and determinations that, if ignored, could lead to errors and biases in his research. These included, most prominently, anachronisms (imposing modern categories, concepts, and knowledge on past societies and cultures), mirror traps (when two schools or theorists who compete socially also oppose each other theoretically, even though their theoretical opposition may be resolvable), and scholastic bias (when the researcher assumes that everyone observes and analyses the world in the way they do). Bourdieu writes:

> Cette forme tout à fait insolite de réflexion conduit à répudier les prétentions absolutistes de l'objectivité classique mais sans condamner pour autant au relativisme: en effet, les conditions de possibilité du sujet scientifique et celles de son objet ne font qu'un et à tout progrès dans la connaissance des conditions sociales de production des sujets scientifiques correspond un progrès dans la connaissance de l'objet scientifique, et inversement (*RA*, 343).[91]

Once we become aware of our relation to the object of study—including both differences and similarities, and perhaps also a similarity within difference, grounded in the homology between the researcher's position

91 'This totally unprecedented form of reflection leads to repudiating the absolutist pretensions of classical objectivity, but without being then condemned to relativism. In effect, the conditions of possibility of the scientific subject and those of its object are one and the same; to any progress in the knowledge of the social conditions of production of scientific subjects corresponds progress in the knowledge of the scientific object, and vice versa' (*Rules*, 208).

and the structure of the field under analysis—every critique of others also sharpens the researcher's self-understanding. Conversely, every gain in reflexivity makes it possible to see more deeply into the lives of others. Of course, these effects will be stronger the closer to the research object we are in time and social space.

Bourdieu's project for a reflexive social science may be less unprecedented than he claims. It is a truism that it is easier to find fault in others than in ourselves, and that we should try to learn from the mistakes of others. Moreover, writers and academics have long been aware of belonging to disciplines and traditions, with factions and competing interests that can bias their judgements. What distinguishes Bourdieu is not that he discovered these basic facts of intellectual life, but that he sought to integrate them into the practice of research itself, where they guided his choice of research objects and drove the development of his theory.

Finally, Bourdieu asks for his own texts to be read reflexively: his readers must consider how their own point of view is socially conditioned, and how this may shape their reading (*RA*, 342). The irony, of course, is that a method intended to suspend unexamined judgement may itself become the object of precisely such judgement. This is especially likely when readers feel that their commitments, intellectual investments, or sense of self are under threat, and respond defensively. Against this tendency, we are called to apply to our own acts of reading and judgement the same methods that Bourdieu uses in his analyses, by examining the social conditions, intellectual investments, and inherited categories that shape our responses to his work. This need not entail a full-scale sociological self-analysis, but it does require that we treat our own interpretations as situated, interested, and therefore open to examination.

Yet in demanding reflexivity from his readers, Bourdieu also presupposes that they enjoy the social conditions that make such reflexive work possible, such as time, relative security, and access to the intellectual resources, institutions, and traditions on which critical reflection depends. These conditions are, however, neither universal nor secure. On the contrary, as we will see in Chapter 3, Bourdieu believed them to be increasingly endangered by the commercial, political, and media pressures eroding the autonomy of intellectual life.

# 3. Autonomy

Having set out Pierre Bourdieu's theory and method of literary analysis and introduced its later developments, this chapter explores his underexamined but central concept of autonomy, understood as the condition that structures the relation between field, capital, and habitus. Autonomy is fundamental to Bourdieu's thinking about literary fields because fields are constituted through a historical process of autonomisation and differentiation, through which they come to generate their own values, hierarchies, and forms of specific capital. This process also gives rise to the dispositions characteristic of the "pure" writer, whose habitus is oriented predominantly towards literary rather than economic or political ends, and to the birth of the modern literary intellectual, first embodied, in Bourdieu's account, by Zola.

The chapter begins by tracing Bourdieu's account of the emergence of the literary field as a long history of differentiation and symbolic capital accumulation. It divides this history into three phases. First, it follows the evolution of the literary field through its main stages up to 1830, which Bourdieu identifies as a critical moment when a faction of writers turned away from the book-buying public and began to compete according to their own rules and standards. This section compares Bourdieu's version of events with those of other literary critics and historians, and addresses some of the criticisms made of it. The chapter then turns to the years 1830 to 1880, when the opposition between art and money established itself as one of the field's fundamental structures and structuring principles. Finally, it examines Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus Affair in 1898 as the moment when writers broke out of their self-imposed isolation and brought the French literary field to what Bourdieu describes as the high point of its autonomy. Having traced this history of autonomisation, the chapter focuses on the relationship between literary autonomy and cultural value. It closes with Bourdieu's

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account of the reversal of autonomous gains in the French literary and publishing fields, which, he warned, had entered a period of restoration and involution.

## The evolution of the literary field

'Au fondement de la théorie des champs', Bourdieu writes, 'il y a le constat (qu'on trouve déjà chez Spencer, chez Durkheim, chez Weber...) que le monde social est le lieu d'un processus de différenciation progressive' (*RP*, 158).[1] Beginning with tribal communities characterised, according to Durkheim, by an original state of homogeneity and the pervasiveness of religion, human societies have evolved into highly differentiated nation-states, in which politics, the economy, religion, and so on form separate 'spheres of activity' (Weber). Drawing in particular on Weber, the second key term Bourdieu uses to understand this process is 'autonomisation'. Insofar as each field becomes differentiated from the others, it imposes its own *nomos* on its members, where *nomos* signifies the fundamental law or rules of the game operational in a particular field.[2] Bourdieu offers as particularly striking examples of alternative *nomoi* the artistic and economic fields, with almost opposite hierarchies to each other. The field of cultural production is 'un monde économique à l'envers',[3] in which success is almost inversely proportional to success in the market (*RA*, 139; 356).

In several texts, Bourdieu sketches the history of French literature as part of this much vaster process of differentiation–autonomisation, which has proceeded at different rates and rhythms in different national traditions.[4] In early societies, literature was encompassed within 'un spectacle total et immédiatement accessible [unissant] toutes les

1 'At the very foundation of the theory of fields is the observation (which is already found in Spencer, Durkheim, Weber...) that the social world is the site of a process of progressive differentiation' (*Practical Reason*, 83).

2 Bourdieu glosses *nomos* (derived from the Greek νόμος) as *loi* ('law'), in the usual sense, but also as *constitution* ('constitution'), which recalls its historical institution, and as *principe de vision et de division* ('principle of vision and division'), which he says is closer to the word's etymology (*MP*, 116).

3 'an economic world reversed' (trans. J.S.).

4 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Le marché des biens symboliques', *L'Année sociologique*, 22 (1971), 49–126; Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les Temps modernes*, 246 (1966), 865–906; *MP*, pp. 30–32.

formes d'expression, musique, danse, théâtre et chant'.[5] Art was then a communal enterprise, and the distinction between the performers and the audience was fluid.[6] The first relatively autonomous cultural field to form was probably Greek philosophy, in the fifth century BC. Its social separation from the politico-religious field was accompanied by a mental shift 'de la raison analogique (celle du mythe et du rite) à la raison logique (celle de la philosophie)' (*MP*, 27–28).[7] After a hiatus in the Middle Ages, the process began again with the Renaissance in fifteenth-century Florence, where the fields of art, literature, and science separated from philosophy and religion.[8] It was interrupted again by two centuries of absolutist rule by the European monarchies and the Counter-Reformation. It was during this period, however, that writers received a measure of social recognition (above manual labourers, but without being integrated into the dominant class), which both fixed and consolidated their social position. In France, a significant gain was the establishment of the Académie française in 1635, which provided writers with a central authority endowed with a specific literary legitimacy. Yet Bourdieu contests Alain Viala's thesis in *Naissance de l'écrivain* that it was at this moment that the figure of the writer definitively appeared.[9] 'En effet', Bourdieu writes, 'ce processus reste longtemps ambigu, voire contradictoire, dans la mesure où les artistes doivent payer d'une dépendance statutaire à l'égard de l'État la reconnaissance et le statut officiel qu'il leur accorde' (*RA*, 193 n. 1).[10] In Bourdieu's timeline, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the French literary field reached a degree of autonomy it has not exceeded since,

5 'a total spectacle [unifying] all the forms of expression, music, dance, theatre and song' (trans. J.S.). Bourdieu, 'Le marché des biens symboliques', p. 67.

6 In support of this contention, Bourdieu cites a long list of ethnographers and their works, including John Greenway, *Literature among the Primitives* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1964), and Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963).

7 'from analogical reason (that of myth or rite) to logical reason (that of philosophy)' (*Meditations*, 18).

8 Bourdieu's reference here is Ernst Cassirer, *Individu et cosmos* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983).

9 Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain : sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

10 'In effect, for a long time this process remains ambiguous, even contradictory, to the extent that artists must pay with a statutory dependence on the state for the recognition and official status that it accords them' (*Rules,* 114 n. 1).

through its almost total separation from the state and the market.

Pascale Casanova extends Bourdieu's account of the autonomisation of the literary field in her study *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999). According to Casanova, the dimension of 'world literary space' was created in the sixteenth century, when Joachim du Bellay's *La Deffence, et illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549) declared that French was the equal of Latin and Greek, and sparked a competition for linguistic prestige between nations. This competition played an important part in the construction of national identities and consciousness, which contributed at once to the linguistic and political unification of nation-states. Literature became a source of national pride, and the "classics" became part of the nation's common culture. Since then, the struggle between nations for literary prestige (or, in Bourdieu's terms, symbolic capital) has proceeded relatively independently of the struggles for world economic and political power.

This point is also emphasised by Bourdieu in one of his earliest articles on literature and art, 'Le marché des biens symboliques' (1971). In an apparent paradox, the end of writers' dependence on the state and the aristocracy was made possible by the appearance of an expanding market—itself tied to rising levels of literacy, advances in printing, and the concentration of large populations in ever-expanding cities. In response to this new market, the population of writers expanded, diversified, and professionalised, to cater to the new classes and categories of readers (including women, the urban middle classes, and, later, the working class). There was also a proliferation of publishers, newspapers, reviews, literary magazines, salons, academies, and learned societies, which decentred the sources of legitimisation and opened multiple channels for dissemination.[11] Despite imposing new demands on writers (particularly those of the market), this diversification also opened new possibilities for artistic liberty, as the market offered an alternative source of income and a new principle of legitimisation that freed writers from restrictive commissions and direct patronage. Yet now writers faced an anonymous and impersonal market, whose judgements could be more pitiless than those of their paternalistic patrons, and could create sharp disparities among them. It was partly in reaction to the appearance of

11 Bourdieu, 'Le marché des biens symboliques', p. 52.

so-called industrial literature, which followed popular formulas and was produced on demand, that a fraction of writers began to compete with one another over the stakes of originality and independence. For these writers, literature became a battle against conventions—with the result that they succeeded in alienating the vast majority of readers.

By dating the moment of this rupture to the years around 1830, Bourdieu agrees with literary critics and historians including Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes.[12] Yet there has been some controversy over what Bourdieu meant by proposing this apparently uncontentious cut-off point. Denis Saint-Jacques and Alain Viala point to the apparent contradiction between Bourdieu's mention in *Les Règles de l'art* of antecedents of literary bohemia (such as those identified by Roger Darnton in the eighteenth century) and his affirmation that what occurred in the nineteenth century was 'sans précédent' (*RA*, 98).[13] Saint-Jacques and Viala find the same confusion and discrepancy between the first and second parts of the book.[14] In my reading of *Les Règles*, Bourdieu is quite clear on this point (and in both parts of the book):

> S'il est vrai que l'on peut repérer le moment où le lent processus d'émergence (comme dit, très justement, Ian Hacking) d'une structure subit la transformation décisive qui semble conduire à l'accomplissement de la structure, il est tout aussi vrai que l'on peut situer en chacun des moments de ce processus continu et collectif l'émergence d'une forme provisoire de la structure, déjà capable d'orienter et de commander les phénomènes qui peuvent s'y produire, et contribuer ainsi à l'élaboration plus accomplie de la structure (*RA*, 222–23).[15]

12 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture : suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

13 'without precedent' (*Rules*, 63).

14 Denis Saint-Jacques and Alain Viala, 'À propos du champ littéraire : histoire, géographie, histoire littéraire', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu : dettes et critiques*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), pp. 59–74, https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.lahir.2001.01.0059

15 'Though it is true that one can locate the moment when the slow process of emergence (as Ian Hacking rightly says) of a structure undergoes the decisive transformation that seems to lead to the fulfilment of the structure, it is just as true that one may locate at each of the stages in this continuous and collective process the emergence of a provisional form of that structure, already capable of influencing and controlling the phenomena that may be produced there, and thus of contributing to the more finished elaboration of the structure' (*Rules*, 133; trans. modified J.S.).

In the case of the literary and artistic fields, Bourdieu writes:

> Si l'on doit admettre que c'est seulement à la fin du XIXe siècle que parvient à son accomplissement le lent processus qui a rendu possible l'émergence des différents champs de production culturelle et la pleine reconnaissance sociale des personnages sociaux correspondants, le peintre, l'écrivain, le savant etc., il ne fait pas de doute qu'on peut en faire remonter les premiers commencements aussi loin que l'on voudra, c'est-à-dire au moment même où des producteurs culturels font leur apparition, qui luttent (presque par définition) pour faire reconnaître leur indépendance et leur dignité particulière (*RA*, 423 n. 61).[16]

There is thus a double error to be avoided: the illusion of first beginnings ("never before"), and the illusion of constancy ("nothing new"). What is new in the nineteenth century is the position of the autonomous writer and the associated dispositions of disinterest (indifference to the verdicts of the market), moral neutrality (not immorality), and political independence: a social position and personage inconceivable in earlier epochs and previous states of the field. Yet the position of the modern writer and the corresponding dispositions did not emerge from nowhere. They were the product of a long collective process, which continued even when field autonomy was not its immediate, eventual, or even conscious aim.

We can pause to assess what Bourdieu brings to literary history, which has long stressed the evolutionary character of literary production. Bourdieu claims that there has been a veritable amnesia concerning the historical genesis of literature and art, requiring a sociological work of *anamnèse* ('anamnesis') to bring these historical conditions back into awareness (*RA*, 473). As is sometimes the case with Bourdieu, this gives an excessively dim view of literary scholarship and casts his own work in too favourable a light. The history sketched by Bourdieu is itself only skeletal and reaches a significant degree of detail only in his studies of the French literary field in the nineteenth century. For this period,

16 'Although it has to be admitted that the slow process which made possible the emergence of different fields of cultural production and the full social recognition of corresponding social figures (the painter, the writer, the scholar, etc.) reached its culmination only at the end of the nineteenth century, there is no doubt that one could push back its first manifestations as far as one likes, to the moment when cultural producers first appeared, fighting (almost by definition) to have their independence and particular dignity be acknowledged' (*Rules*, 387).

however, we already have the studies by Sartre and Barthes mentioned above, as well as innumerable others that could complement Bourdieu's account. Indeed, it is hard to escape the feeling that Bourdieu's historical analysis fails in practice to live up to the ambition of his theory (or at least to his self-commentary). Perhaps it is both more realistic and more useful to treat Bourdieu's account as a potted history, which provides a broad outline in which to situate any particular object but needs to be supplemented with wider reading as well as more detailed scholarship. The trouble with Bourdieu's rhetoric is that at times he hardly seems to encourage such an approach—although elsewhere he does stress the unfinished and open character of his work (*RA*, 13; 303). Critics need to be wary of simply repeating Bourdieu's self-commentary, while researchers must always remember to look beyond Bourdieu.

## Art and money

At the end of the second phase of the constitution of the literary field, between 1830 and 1880, the literary field coalesced into a structure split between a "pure" or autonomous pole and a "commercial" or heteronomous pole. This split became fixed in people's minds as what Bourdieu calls 'une des structures fondamentales de la vision du monde dominante': the opposition between art and money (*RA*, 156).[17] For Bourdieu, the imposition of this principle of vision and division was a major step on the road to autonomy. Literature no longer needed to justify itself in terms of public popularity or political or religious approval. The field could now produce its own value, deemed to be irreducible to monetary value. Yet Bourdieu argues that this mental shift, which affirmed the value of art for its own sake, was achieved through a systematic disavowal of economic interest. Those involved in literary production could still pursue money, contracts, sales, and professional success, but these interests now had to be denied, displaced, or translated into the language of pure dedication to Art. Indeed, Bourdieu sees a generalised euphemisation pervading both the literary and artistic fields, whereby economic vocabulary and all mention of money are avoided:

17 'one of the fundamental structures of the dominant vision of the world' (*Rules*, 91).

> le marchand de tableaux se dit plutôt directeur de galerie; éditeur est un euphémisme pour marchand de livres, ou acheteur de force de travail littéraire (au XIXe siècle, les écrivains se comparaient souvent à des prostituées...) L'éditeur dit à un jeune auteur aux fins de mois difficiles: 'Regardez Beckett, il n'a jamais touché un sou de ses droits d'auteur !' Et le pauvre écrivain est dans ses petits souliers, il n'est pas sûr d'être Beckett et il est sûr qu'il a la bassesse de réclamer de l'argent... (*RP*, 198).[18]

The discussion of money, especially of the cost and market value of artistic works, became shameful or taboo, as art and money came to be opposed in people's minds. Economic logic was thereby inverted: rather than functioning as the primary aim of practice, money became, for autonomous writers, at most a means to literary independence, while art became an end in itself.

Economic success could be legitimate only if it came later, sometimes even after the writer's death, as the belated consequence of symbolic recognition rather than the immediate aim of literary production. In the interval between the production of the autonomous work and its possible success in the market, writers needed to find some source of income. Bourdieu provides a useful snapshot of the strategies nineteenth-century writers used to secure greater social status and financial stability. New positions in the culture industry, especially in journalism and publishing, allowed some writers without private means to support their writing. This was the case with Théophile Gautier, often credited with coining the phrase *l'art pour l'art*, and with Émile Zola. Of course, the obligation to earn a living remained a hindrance. In this and other respects, writers such as Gustave Flaubert, with a private income—or later Virginia Woolf, with money and a room of her own—enjoyed a significant advantage, since they could afford the single-minded dedication and resistance to compromise for which the author of *Madame Bovary* came to be celebrated as a kind of ideal. As Gautier commented with undisguised envy to Ernest Feydeau, Flaubert 'a eu plus d'esprit que nous, [...] il a eu l'intelligence de venir au monde avec

18 'the art dealer calls herself a gallery director; publisher is a euphemism for book dealer, or buyer of literary labour (in the nineteenth century, writers often compared themselves to prostitutes...). The publisher says to a young writer at the end of a difficult month, "look at Beckett, he has never touched a penny of his royalties!" And the poor writer feels ashamed: he is not sure he's a Beckett, but he is sure that unlike Beckett he is base enough to ask for money' (*Practical Reason*, 11).

un patrimoine quelconque, chose qui est absolument indispensable à quiconque veut faire de l'art.'[19]

Bourdieu finds another source of material and symbolic support for writers in the salon of Napoleon I's niece, Princess Mathilde Bonaparte. Mathilde's patronage and protection may have been less a matter of enlightened taste than of political strategy. Presenting herself as a liberal guardian of French culture and the arts was a way to distinguish herself from the Empress Eugénie, the unpopular Spanish-born wife of Napoleon III. Yet writers and critics associated with the more autonomous sectors of the literary field, including Flaubert, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Hippolyte Taine, George Sand, and Théophile Gautier, whom Mathilde appointed her librarian and cultural advisor in 1868, freeing him from journalistic work, were able to benefit from these struggles within the field of power. As rival dominant factions sought to appropriate the symbolic prestige of literature, writers could secure material support, social protection, and institutional honours: an appointment to the senate for Sainte-Beuve, efforts to obtain an Académie française prize for George Sand, and the Légion d'honneur for Taine and Flaubert—which Flaubert accepted despite his purist axiom that *les honneurs déshonorent* ('honours dishonour') (*RA*, 93).

The literary field could also create symbolic capital, by holding its own celebrations (public readings, award ceremonies, meetings, and similar rituals of consecration), creating positive representations of artists within literary works themselves, and by publishing treatises and criticism that blurred the normative and the descriptive by defining literary quality and value. Bourdieu cites as examples Henry Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* and Honoré de Balzac's *Traité de la vie élégante*, which contributed to creating the social reality they described—that is, the writer and artist as a recognisable figure and the artist's way of life as a respectable social role (*RA*, 99–100). In particular, these works contributed to transforming the material and economic hardship of the struggling artist or *poète maudit* (otherwise imposed by the law of the market) into a chosen ideal (cf. *MP*, 127).

'Les voies de l'autonomie sont complexes', Bourdieu writes, 'sinon

19 Théophile Gautier, quoted in Bourdieu, *RA*, 142–43: '[Flaubert] was smarter than us, [...] he had the intelligence to come into the world with some patrimony, a thing which is absolutely indispensable to anyone who wants to make art' (*Rules*, 84).

impénétrables' (*RA*, 92).[20] Securing autonomy meant following circuitous and often opaque pathways through arrangements such as private income, patronage, journalism, and salons, in order to occupy a position, however precarious, from which dependence could be disavowed, interest transformed, and worldly constraints converted into specifically literary value.

## Zola and the Dreyfus Affair

Following the initial conquest of autonomy and the emergence of the literary field's chiasmic structure, polarised between art and money, Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus Affair marked the culmination of its movement towards autonomy (*RA*, 216). Zola might seem an unlikely hero in the history of autonomisation. In his time, Zola was one of the most commercially successful authors in French history.[21] Yet while Zola's books found an expanding market of eager readers, he also earned the respect of his peers. Bourdieu identifies three factors that combined to exempt Zola from the field's emerging logic, according to which his market success should have ruled out artistic acclaim. Zola's vision of social determinism and conflict (which can be linked to his social background and position in the ascendant fraction of the petite bourgeoisie) found resonances with Darwinism and the clinical gaze, at a time when the scientist was becoming an emblematic social figure in France. According to Bourdieu, Zola explicitly associated his theory of the experimental novel with Claude Bernard's scientific method, in order to avoid the suspicion of vulgarity aroused by both the low social milieus depicted in his novels and the wide public readership they attracted. At the same time, Zola made himself the spokesperson and theoretician of artistic liberty, most notably in his defence of Édouard Manet, asserting in the process his own independence. Even in the stylistic features of his works, Bourdieu argues, Zola affirmed the difference and dignified distance of the Man of Letters from the crowd, maintaining a distinction

20 'the routes of autonomy are complex, if not impenetrable' (*Rules*, 52).

21 See Joseph Jurt, 'Gattungshierarchie und Karrierestrategien im XIX. Jahrhundert', *Lendemains*, 36 (1984), 33–41 (p. 35); and Joseph Jurt, 'Autonomy and Commitment in the French Literary Field: Applying Pierre Bourdieu's Approach', *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 38 (2001), 87–102.

between the language of his working-class characters and that of the narrative voice, to which he gave the rhythms, syntax, and techniques of high literature (*RA*, 198).

Nonetheless, Zola may not have continued to avoid the discredit to which his sales exposed him, had he not intervened in the Dreyfus Affair and succeeded in changing, at least partially, the principles of perception and appreciation by which writers' positions are evaluated (*RA*, 215). In the short term, Zola was financially ruined, his name was blackened, and he was forced into exile. But his intervention proved decisive in shifting public opinion in support of the wrongly convicted Jewish officer; and when Dreyfus was reinstated, Zola emerged a hero, whose integrity and independence could no longer be doubted.[22] According to Bourdieu, Zola's action released writers from the self-imposed isolation they had accepted as the price of their autonomy. Yet his intervention was also founded upon that autonomy. Zola did not become a politician, as François Guizot or Alphonse de Lamartine had done. Nor did he try to compete with politicians at their own game, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau had done by writing constitutional proposals for Poland. Instead, Zola intervened in the political sphere as an intellectual, on the basis of his reputation and expertise as a writer, which gave him a legitimacy he could set against political power. Moreover, as an external observer with no direct stake in the game, he was able to do so in the name of universal values of objective truth and dispassionate justice to which politicians and the judiciary were, at least nominally, accountable. In this way, Zola's intervention both presupposed and reinforced the autonomy of the literary field. It presupposed that autonomy because his authority derived from his standing as a writer rather than from any political mandate, and it reinforced it because it asserted the right of writers to intervene in public affairs in the name of values irreducible to political expediency or economic interest. Bourdieu writes:

> Le « J'accuse » est l'aboutissement et l'accomplissement du processus collectif d'émancipation qui s'est progressivement accompli dans le champ de production culturelle : en tant que rupture prophétique avec l'ordre établi, il réaffirme, contre toutes les raisons d'État, l'irréductibilité des valeurs de vérité et de justice, et, du même coup,

22 See Christophe Charle, *Naissance des « intellectuels » : 1880–1900* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990), pp. 28–36.

> l'indépendance des gardiens de ces valeurs par rapport aux normes de la politique (celles du patriotisme par exemple), et aux contraintes de la vie économique (*RA*, 216).[23]

Bourdieu's celebration in *Les Règles* of Zola's 'inaugural' intervention, which 'invented' the 'new' figure of the intellectual, may seem to imply that he had fallen victim to the very illusion of first beginnings which, as we have seen, he warns his readers against. Elsewhere, however, Bourdieu does acknowledge precursors to Zola: Victor Hugo, who published political pamphlets in exile on the basis of his literary fame; Edgar Quinet, who combined literary writing with activism; and as far back as Voltaire, who, in the entry on 'l'homme de lettres' in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, had already opposed the engagement of the *philosophes* to the scholasticism of the *doctes* in the universities and academies (*I*, 258). Yet while acknowledging this lineage Bourdieu also insists that Zola was the first to transcend fully the alternative between commitment and withdrawal, two extremes between which intellectuals had swung like a pendulum throughout modern history. The commitment of the *philosophes* was continued by the politically engaged *hommes de lettres* ('men of letters') of the French Revolution. This was followed by the Romantic withdrawal, and then by renewed engagement in reaction to the Restoration. Disillusioned by the defeat of the revolutionary movement of 1848 and the establishment of the Second Empire, the generation of Flaubert and Baudelaire retreated, this time into an elitist rejection of bourgeois society. This aloof position, however, provided Zola with a platform from which to launch his political intervention. The role of the intellectual in France has since been essentially two-dimensional, defined by a combination of autonomy and commitment. This tradition was continued by prominent French intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Bourdieu.

Yet Bourdieu also stresses that Zola's model of autonomous engagement is not established once and for all. Cultural producers can

23 '*J'Accuse* is the outcome and the fulfilment of a collective process of emancipation that is progressively carried out in the field of cultural production: as a prophetic rupture with the established order, it reasserts against all reasons of state the irreducibility of the values of truth and justice, and, at the same stroke, the independence of the guardians of these values from the norms of politics (those of patriotism, for example) and from the constraints of economic life' (*Rules*, 129).

always regress towards one side or other of the alternative between the ivory tower and direct political action (*RA*, 551). It is also possible for this model to be improved—and it may need to be, as the traditional forms of intellectual intervention that have hardly developed since Zola's time, such as petitions, open letters, and public declarations, lose their symbolic force in competition with new forms of communication, control, and censorship. As we will see in Chapter 5, it was in this context that Bourdieu appealed for the establishment of an *intellectuel collectif* ('collective intellectual'), which could summon the combined symbolic capital of the intellectual community in support of political interventions. This would entail a new conception of the intellectual: no longer the lone genius, celebrity, or self-sacrificing hero, but part of an organised force capable of combining the specialised competences and symbolic capital of different intellectual fields, and of placing them in the service of collective political action.

## Reversals

Reading *Les Règles*, one might be left with the impression that the French literary field had progressively built up its autonomy over the centuries, until, in the nineteenth century, it finally broke free from direct dependence on the state, the market, and religion. Bourdieu describes this process as 'réellement irréversible' (*RA*, 398).[24] Each new generation could pick up where the previous generation left off: 'les nouveaux entrants [...] peuvent faire l'économie des sacrifices et des ruptures plus ou moins héroïques du passé' (*RA*, 424).[25] The result is a sense of internal momentum towards ever greater autonomy. It may therefore come as a surprise when, in the postscript to *Les Règles*, Bourdieu announces that the literary field had entered a period of regression or restoration. This surprise would not simply be the result of a careless reading. Bourdieu himself admits to having shared the assumption that the movement towards greater autonomy was continuing. In a 1992 interview, he explains that he changed his mind only after conversations with the German conceptual artist Hans Haacke, whom he first met in

24 'truly irreversible' (*Rules*, 242).

25 'new entrants [...] may skip over the more or less heroic sacrifices and ruptures of the past' (*Rules*, 257).

1989, and who warned him: 'attention, on retombe dans le mécénat.'[26] As a result, and as its subtitle—or perhaps its real title—indicates, *Les Règles* is concerned above all with the *Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* ('Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field') and has much less to say about the reverse process. Yet the postscript suggests that this had become the more urgent research question, as new forms of commercial pressure were imposing themselves on the field:

> Il faudrait analyser les nouvelles formes de mainmise et de dépendance, comme celles qu'instaure le mécénat, et contre lesquelles les « bénéficiaires » n'ont pas encore développé de systèmes de défense appropriés (*RA*, 555).[27]

Bourdieu's major contribution to this research area came in one of his final published pieces of empirical research, 'Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition' (1999).[28] There, Bourdieu describes how, from the 1970s onwards, the French publishing industry entered a phase of rapid concentration, culminating in the emergence, during the 1980s and 1990s, of two dominant groups: Hachette and Havas. Both were tied to corporate structures with little historical connection to the literary field: Hachette to Matra, a group associated with aeronautics and armaments, and Havas to what became Vivendi, the former Compagnie Générale des Eaux. These groups brought together scores of imprints and belonged to conglomerates whose annual turnovers ran into billions of French francs (*RC*, 7). According to Bourdieu, the sheer scale of these enterprises determined their editorial policies, demanding a rapid succession of titles and quick returns on their capital. Of course, some publishers resisted commercialisation, notably Les Éditions de

26 'watch out, we are falling back into patronage' (trans. J.S.). Isabelle Graw and Pierre Bourdieu, 'Que suis-je ? Une entrevue avec Pierre Bourdieu', trans. by Véronique Gola, first published as 'Ein Interview mit Pierre Bourdieu von Isabelle Graw', *The Thing* (1996), http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/socio/bourdieu/entrevue/quesui.html

27 'It would be necessary to analyse the new forms of stranglehold and dependence, like the ones introduced by sponsorship, and of which the "beneficiaries" have not yet developed appropriate systems of defence since they are not fully aware of their effects' (*Rules*, 345).

28 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 126–27 (1999), 3–28, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1999.3278. Further references to this article will be abbreviated to *RC*, followed by the page number, and included in the text.

Minuit, which, along with scattered regional and fledgling publishers, represented (by 1999) one of the last bastions of literary and editorial autonomy (*RC*, 26).

Another concern for Bourdieu was the disappearance of the specialist bookstores upon which these specialist publishers relied to launch their most inventive and controversial new signings, as supermarket chains such as Leclerc and media megastores such as Fnac entered the book trade (*RC*, 14). According to Yves Surel, as a direct consequence of the aggressive pricing policies of these new entrants, the market share of traditional bookstores fell from 51% in 1968 to around 31% in 1981, replaced by chain stores locked in competition for profits, with little interest in promoting non-commercial literature.[29]

Finally, Bourdieu reserved some of his strongest warnings for the rise of powerful new sources of literary consecration, notably on television, with the discussion programme *Apostrophes* as a prime example. These were challenging traditional authorities, such as the school, literary prizes, journals, and so on, and increasingly acted as gatekeepers to the public sphere. Of course, media personalities and journalists would still doff their caps at established authors and profess their appreciation for the classics. But they also praised as the heirs and equals of great authors writers whose work presented little that was new, and might even be a regression in comparison to the achievements of the past. In the postscript to *Les Règles,* Bourdieu claims that

> ce brouillage des frontières auquel les producteurs dits « médiatiques » sont spontanément inclinés (comme en témoigne le fait que les palmarès journalistiques juxtaposent toujours les producteurs les plus autonomes et les plus hétéronomes) constitue la pire menace pour l'autonomie de la production culturelle (*RA*, 556–57).

One might wonder whether the juxtaposition of autonomous and heteronomous producers in journalistic rankings really constitutes the worst threat to cultural autonomy, especially when compared with censorship, political coercion, corporate ownership, or the economic destruction of independent publishing and bookselling. Yet Bourdieu's point is perhaps that this boundary-blurring operates in a more insidious

29 See Yves Surel, 'Le Destin de la loi Lang du 10 août 1981', in *Le Prix du livre 1981–2006 : la loi Lang*, ed. by Olivier Corpet (Paris: IMEC, 2006), pp. 9–29.

way. By placing autonomous and heteronomous producers side by side, journalistic rankings and literary programmes tended to treat media visibility, sales, and accessibility as if they were equivalent to specifically literary recognition. In doing so, they weakened the boundary between the restricted literary field and the market, allowing commercial criteria to enter the field under the guise of neutral cultural judgement.

Bourdieu was not the only one sounding the alarm. From the late 1970s, an increasing number of editors led by Jérôme Lindon (post-war director of Les Éditions de Minuit) began to mobilise opposition under the slogan '*le livre n'est pas un produit comme les autres*'[30] to prevent commercially driven distributors from offering deep discounts on publisher-set prices and from stocking their shelves almost exclusively with bestsellers. This campaign eventually won the support of the new Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, who in 1981 introduced the so-called Loi Lang, setting a single fixed price for books, chosen by publishers, and requiring all retailers to respect it. The subject also attracted the attention of social scientists. In 1992, François Rouet's *Le livre : mutations d'une industrie culturelle* highlighted the fragile state of small and medium-sized publishers and the destruction of the network of bookshops.[31] As the front cover warned, 'Le livre est non seulement en crise [...] mais il est maintenant en danger'.[32] The next year, in 1993, Jean-Marie Bouvaist's *Crise et mutations dans l'édition française*[33] documented in great detail the history and evolution of the French publishing industry, which he describes as increasingly overrun by commercial logic.

Bourdieu did not discuss the possibilities opened up by internet publishing, blogs, e-books, and other digital media; he died in 2002, just as many of these developments were beginning to transform literary production and circulation. But we can imagine he might have been sceptical of the promises often made in their name. Social networking sites can take the place of cafés and bookshops in which artistic communities used to congregate; writers can publish their own material online and reach an international readership with

30 'books are not just products' (trans. J.S.).

31 François Rouet, *Le Livre : mutations d'une industrie culturelle* (Paris: Documentation française, 1992).

32 'The book industry is not only in crisis, it is now in danger' (trans. J.S.).

33 Jean-Marie Bouvaist, *Crise et mutations dans l'édition française* (Paris: Éditions du Cercle de la librairie, 1993).

unimaginable ease and speed; digital media allow for unprecedented freedom of expression, combining text, graphics, sound, and film. Yet from Bourdieu's perspective, it is hard to imagine a more nightmarish vision of literary life than its reduction to this ethereal and ephemeral existence, where writers and critics have to compete for their position in search-engine rankings, where symbolic capital is reduced to anonymous clicks, where there is little prospect of economic profit, even in the long term, and where the boundary between the artist and the general public is once again becoming indistinct.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's account of the nineteenth-century literary field suggests that such developments need not be read solely in dystopian terms. Nineteenth-century writers found ways to navigate the emerging culture industry, using journalism, serial publication, reviews, salons, patronage, and publishing networks both to survive materially and to accumulate symbolic capital. Writers today may likewise learn to operate within, against, and across the new conditions created by digital media. Contemporary equivalents—crowdfunding, subscription platforms, freelance journalism, grants, residencies, public appearances, and online journals—can sustain literary activity beyond direct book sales. A writer may begin with a modest readership on a personal blog, contribute to collaborative digital magazines or online literary communities, and eventually secure contracts with established publishers. The trajectory of Tao Lin, from blog-based and small-press literary culture to publication with Vintage, offers one example of how digital visibility may be converted into more conventional literary recognition, in a process not wholly unlike the slow accumulation of prestige through specialist bookshops, little magazines, reviews, and literary networks in earlier periods. Yet such supports remain double-edged. Like Princess Mathilde's patronage or the newspaper market in the nineteenth century, they may create the material conditions for autonomy while also introducing new forms of dependence: on patrons, platforms, audiences, institutions, algorithms, or public visibility. The question, then, is not simply whether literary autonomy is disappearing, but what new configurations of autonomy and dependence are emerging under these altered conditions.

## Autonomy and value

Bourdieu does not stop at tracing the autonomisation of the literary field and the historical formation of its distinctive principles of judgement. At times, he seems to endorse those principles—by suggesting that works written with a "pure" or autonomous intention are indeed more valuable than those influenced by "commercial" or heteronomous demands. This tendency to valorise autonomous works cannot simply be explained by the difficulty of distinguishing between the hierarchies operative within a field and the analyst's own value judgements—so that, as Bourdieu comments, 'quand je dis que la bande dessinée est un genre inférieur [...] il faut que je dise à la fois que c'est comme ça, mais que ce n'est pas moi qui le pense' (*CD*, 67).[34] This difficulty may help explain his use of the polemical labels current within the nineteenth-century field, such as 'pure' and 'bourgeois' art, or his references to 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' culture. Even the more technical concepts of "autonomy" and "heteronomy" are hardly value-free. Yet in several places Bourdieu goes further, hinting that his theoretical model does not merely register the field's valorisation of autonomous culture, but also justifies it. This suggestion appears first in his discussion of Flaubert's ascetic dedication to his craft:

> Peut-être tient-on là, pour ceux qui le réclament, un critère assez indiscutable de la valeur de toute production artistique et, plus largement, intellectuelle, à savoir l'investissement dans l'œuvre qui peut se mesurer aux coûts en efforts, en sacrifices de tous ordres et, en définitive, en temps, et qui va de pair, de ce fait, avec l'indépendance par rapport aux forces et aux contraintes qui s'exercent de l'extérieur du champ ou, pire, de l'intérieur, comme les séductions de la mode ou les pressions du conformisme éthique ou logique avec, par exemple, les problématiques obligées, les sujets imposés, les formes d'expression agréées, etc. (*RA*, 145).[35]

34 'when I say that comic strips are an inferior genre, you might imagine I really think that. So I have to say at one and the same time that's how it is, but that it isn't my opinion' (*Other Words*, 52).

35 'Maybe there is here, for those who want it, a rather indisputable criterion of value for all artistic production, and, more generally, for intellectual production: the investment in a work which is measurable by the cost in effort, in sacrifices of all kinds and, definitively, in time, and which goes hand in hand with the consequent independence from the forces and constraints exercised outside the field, or, worse, within it, such as the seductions of fashion or the pressures of ethical or logical conformism—for example, the required themes, obligatory subjects, conventional

Here, Bourdieu ties artistic value to the time and effort the creator has put into the work, which would seem to be greater in works that break with conventions rather than follow them. The problem, of course, is that not every groundbreaking work requires great labour or much time on the part of the artist or author. Doubtless, we should not deny the individual sacrifices of Flaubert or many other struggling artists. However, it is no more true that intellectuals and artists are all self-sacrificing workaholics than that they are all naturally gifted geniuses.

Bourdieu himself makes this point in his discussions of Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp was a virtuoso who seems to have had little difficulty reconciling fine art with fast cars and a busy social life. In this respect, he offers an almost perfect counterpoint to Flaubert: where Flaubert appears as the ascetic labourer of form, sacrificing time, comfort, and pleasure to the demands of style, Duchamp appears as one of Bourdieu's *héritiers*. Immersed in artistic culture from his earliest days, 'Marcel Duchamp est dans le champ artistique comme un poisson dans l'eau' (*RA,* 406).[36] It is Duchamp's *ready-mades*, however, that present Bourdieu's tentative theory of cultural value with its most obvious difficulty. What could take less time and effort than scribbling *R. Mutt* on a urinal and displaying it on a plinth? And yet *Fountain* most definitely broke with 'les problématiques obligées' and 'les sujets imposés' in the field, being famously rejected by the Society of Independent Artists.

In fact, it is possible to construct a more comprehensive theory of cultural value based on Bourdieu's conception of field autonomy: one grounded not simply in the visible effort of the individual creator, but in the accumulated labour of a field that makes certain works possible, intelligible, and worthy of recognition. Duchamp the individual may not have put a great deal of time or effort into producing his *ready-mades*, nor even into developing the artistic dispositions that made such gestures possible: these were acquired early, through his immersion in an artistic family milieu. But the creative audacity that may have cost him little as an individual gesture had its precedent in many centuries of struggles for artistic autonomy. Bourdieu makes the same argument for James Joyce and William Faulkner: 'Il a fallu un travail collectif énorme pour arriver à produire des œuvres comme celle de Joyce ou Faulkner,

forms of expression and so forth' (*Rules,* 85).

36 'Marcel Duchamp moves in the artistic field like a fish in water' (*Rules,* 246).

il a fallu des générations et des générations, il a fallu des institutions, des critiques, etc.' (*CP*, 46).[37] Placed in this historical perspective, the value of a work cannot be reduced to the visible effort of its individual maker alone. It depends on an immense accumulation of prior labour: the long struggles through which the field won a relative autonomy, elaborated its own criteria of judgement, and produced the belief that certain objects are worth perceiving as art at all.

Although intuitively appealing, however, even this more developed theory of cultural value appears, on closer inspection, hardly indisputable. Many of us put a great deal of time and effort into things that contribute little, if anything, to human happiness and well-being. In the current climate of anti-intellectualism, aimed particularly at the humanities, those of us with an interest in literary culture will have to do better than that. The chapters that follow therefore examine this question in terms of literature's use value: as a mode of knowledge, as a resource for political intervention, and as an educational good that can help develop linguistic, imaginative, and critical capacities. Throughout, autonomy will remain the unifying principle connecting these three forms of use value: as the condition of literature's distinctive mode of knowledge, as the basis of its symbolic power, and as a fragile achievement whose institutional conditions Bourdieu sought to defend.

37 'It required enormous collective labour before works like those of Joyce and Faulkner could be produced, it required generations and generations, it required institutions, critics, etc.' (trans. J.S.).

# 4. Literature and Science

From *Le Métier de sociologue* to *Les Règles de l'art*, Pierre Bourdieu repeatedly presented sociology as a discipline grounded in objectivity, methodological rupture, and the patient construction of verifiable relations. Few sociologists have insisted more forcefully on the scientific status of their analyses, or more relentlessly criticised forms of thought they regarded as impressionistic, insufficiently rigorous, or lacking in reflexive control. This uncompromising claim to science has shaped the reception of Bourdieu's writings on literature in particular, which have frequently been perceived not simply as interpretations of literary works, but as acts of demystification directed against literature itself. His analyses of writers, critics, and institutions have thus often appeared as attacks on aesthetic value, literary belief, or the autonomy of art, reducing works to effects of social structures and symbolic struggles. Yet this perception is only partly justified. Although Bourdieu undoubtedly accords science a privileged capacity for explicit objectivation, his sociology of literature is also driven by a profound admiration for the distinctive powers of literary form. The tension between these two commitments—between scientific explanation and literary experience, demystification and aesthetic belief—lies at the centre of his work on literature, and forms the guiding problem of this chapter.

The chapter begins by reading Bourdieu's analysis of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* as a study of the differences between scientific and literary representations of social reality. It then assesses the charges of reductionism and scientism that have been levelled against Bourdieu and considers the extent to which they may be justified. Next, it explores the possibilities for crossovers or exchanges between literature and sociology, as two distinct discourses that nonetheless have much to learn from each other. Finally, it compares Bourdieu's position to contemporary postmodern and post-structuralist theories of the

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relations between literature, science, and reality. The core argument is that Bourdieu does not simply subordinate literature to sociology but understands the two as distinct yet potentially complementary ways of disclosing social reality.

## *L'Éducation sentimentale*

At various points across his work, but especially in *Les Règles de l'art*, Bourdieu sets out a series of parallels and oppositions between science and literature. Both scientific and literary texts, he argues, objectify—that is, construct a model of—the usually unseen social and psychological structures that regulate experience. Yet whereas scientific discourse submits its claims to empirical verification, literary fiction does not claim to refer to reality—indeed, quite the opposite. According to Bourdieu, the literary work operates 'un euphémisme généralisé' (*RA*, 69),[1] which "denegates" (in the Freudian sense of *Verneinung*) the social reality to which it refers '*mais comme s'il n'en parlait pas*' (*RA*, 20).[2] In contrast, 'la science tente de dire les choses comme elles sont, sans euphémismes, et demande à être prise au sérieux' (*RA*, 541),[3] as an accurate representation of reality.

Literature also reveals social and psychological structures in a different way: not as systems of intelligible relations but by way of analogy, demonstrations, examples, or evocations, 'aptes à "parler à la sensibilité" et à obtenir une croyance et une participation analogues à celles que nous accordons d'ordinaire au monde réel' (*RA*, 68).[4] Thus, while sociological theory symbolises the structure of relations that determine and orient our practices, investments, and interests, literature (most obviously the literature we call realist, but not only) shows these structures in action, in sensible form.

It is above all in his analysis of *L'Éducation sentimentale* that Bourdieu explores these oppositions between literature and science. According to Bourdieu, Flaubert's novel provides a very accurate—even quasi-

1 'a generalized euphemism' (*Rules*, 32).
2 'as if it did not speak of it' (*Rules*, 3).
3 'science tries to speak of things as they are, without euphemisms, and asks to be taken seriously' (*Rules*, 336).
4 'a belief and an imaginary participation analogous to those that we ordinarily grant to the real world' (*Rules*, 32).

scientific—representation of the nineteenth-century French social world in which it was written. Yet he resists the temptation to read *L'Éducation sentimentale* as a sociological document, however plausible that might seem given the density of social detail in Flaubert's work. For Bourdieu, the deeper homology between Frédéric's fictional world and Flaubert's social world is situated at the level of their structure. This structure is perceptible in the novel, as in everyday reality, only through its effects, which goes some way to explaining why it has, or so Bourdieu claims, 'échappé aux interprètes les plus attentifs' (*RA*, 19).[5]

'Pour dévoiler complètement la structure que le texte littéraire ne dévoilait qu'en la voilant', Bourdieu writes, 'l'analyse doit réduire le récit d'une aventure au protocole d'une sorte de montage expérimental' (*RA*, 69).[6] Taking note of who attends the various soirées, receptions, and reunions, and using the many details Flaubert provides as clues to his characters' social positions, lifestyles, tastes, property and financial assets, and so on, Bourdieu divides the twenty protagonists into overlapping groups, which he represents visually by means of a sociogram. The two main groups are dominated by M. Arnoux and M. Dambreuse, the art dealer and the banker, who represent the dominant cultural and economic positions in the field of power respectively, and who attract and repel the other characters like the poles of a magnet (*RA*, 24–25). The reader will recognise the structure of the French field of power, with its opposition between cultural and economic poles. Where the characters are positioned in this structure will then orient their conduct in the narrative. Each position, embodied as habitus, provides a sort of 'formule génératrice'[7] that orients where their interests lie and circumscribes their probable attitudes and responses in any given social situation. The narrative then appears in the light of this model as a series of set pieces, in which Flaubert experiments with different combinations of characters and scenarios: developing 'dans une aventure nécessaire toutes les implications de leurs "formules" respectives' (*RA*, 37–38).[8]

5 'eluded the most attentive interpreters' (*Rules*, 3).

6 'In order to unveil completely the structure that a literary text could only unveil by veiling, the analysis should reduce the story of an adventure to the protocol of an experimental montage' (*Rules*, 32).

7 'generative formula' (*Rules*, 13).

8 'in a necessary adventure all the implications of their respective "formulas"' (*Rules*, 14).

According to Bourdieu, the extremely close analogy between the structure that propels the narrative and that which coordinates the practices of agents in social reality is the basis of the particularly intense '*effet de croyance* (plutôt que de réel)' it produces. Bourdieu's understanding of this 'belief effect' is rather different from Roland Barthes's *effet de réel* ('reality effect'). For Barthes, it is the 'détails "inutiles"'[9] within a narrative description that, by their apparent contingency and superfluousness, strike the reader as realistic.[10] In contrast, for Bourdieu it is the exaggerated significance of every detail, meticulously selected and arranged by the author, that gives *L'Éducation sentimentale* its almost hyperrealistic quality, since nothing appears merely incidental. What Bourdieu calls 'le travail d'écriture crée [...] un univers saturé de détails significatifs et, par là, plus signifiant que nature' (*RA*, 22),[11] in which every signifying element—from Deslauriers's beer and Arnoux's unusual and exotic wines to Dambreuse's *grands vins de Bordeaux* and the champagne at Rosannette's—evokes a recognisable lifestyle and way of being-in-the-world, making the characters' actions and responses in different social situations appear both coherent and realistic.

Yet Flaubert does not seem to have intended to represent these structures directly: they appear instead as a by-product of the work on form, which was the author's main focus. Bourdieu writes:

> Sous peine de voir l'effet d'une sorte de miracle parfaitement inintelligible dans le fait que l'analyse puisse découvrir dans l'œuvre — comme je l'ai fait pour *L'Éducation sentimentale* — des structures profondes inaccessibles à l'intuition ordinaire (et à la lecture des commentateurs), il faut bien admettre que c'est à travers ce travail sur la forme que se projettent dans l'œuvre ces structures que l'écrivain, comme tout agent social, porte en lui à l'état pratique, sans en détenir véritablement la maîtrise (*RA*, 184).[12]

9 '"useless" details' (trans. J.S.).

10 Roland Barthes, 'L'Effet de réel', *Communications*, 11 (1968), 84–89, https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1968.1158

11 'the work of writing thus creates a universe saturated with significant details, and therefore more signifying than true life' (*Rules*, 5).

12 'Unless one sees as a sort of completely unintelligible miracle the fact that analysis can discover in the work—as I have for *Sentimental Education*, profound structures inaccessible to ordinary intuition (and to the reading of commentators), it must be acknowledged that it is through this work on form that the work comes to contain those structures that the writer, like any social agent, carries within him in a practical way, without having really mastered them' (*Rules*, 108).

We might liken this work on form to the work of a sculptor carving a human figure, whose handling of shape and proportion conveys a felt sense of the body's underlying anatomy without rendering it directly visible. The sculptor does not expose the skeleton, muscles, joints, or internal tensions beneath the skin; rather, these are made perceptible through the modelling of the visible surface—through contour, balance, weight, posture, and movement. In the same way, the more exact Flaubert's work on literary form becomes, the more powerfully the invisible structure beneath it is made felt. Yet the analogy with sculpture may also point to a limit in Bourdieu's formulation. A sculptor's ability to produce a convincing sense of bodily structure may depend not only on practical feel but also on a developed knowledge of anatomy, even if that knowledge is not directly represented in the finished work. By the same token, Flaubert's formal mastery need not exclude a more conscious understanding of the social world than Bourdieu sometimes seems to suggest he had. Even if the author of *L'Éducation sentimentale* does not advance that understanding in the form of explicit sociological statements, the precision with which he distributes gestures, tastes, idioms, hesitations, and ambitions across the social field suggests not only embodied familiarity but also a considerable degree of reflective apprehension.

This qualification touches on a more general difficulty in Bourdieu's account of the relation between literature and science. If the writer objectifies the structures of the social world only indirectly, through the work on form, while the sociologist alone reconstructs those structures explicitly and systematically, then the risk is that literature will appear as a kind of incomplete or unconscious sociology: powerful, even revelatory, but dependent on science to say what it really knows. As Stephen Thomson argues, this would then allow sociology to present itself as the 'final unveiling' of what literature has only disclosed in a displaced or disavowed form, so that Flaubert's novel becomes a kind of 'proxy unconscious' for sociological enlightenment.[13] Moreover, once the novel has been reduced to the structure of the field, the distribution of positions, and the generative formulas of the characters, its literary

13 Stephen Thomson, 'The Instance of the Veil: Bourdieu's Flaubert and the Textuality of Social Science', *Comparative Literature*, 55.4 (Autumn 2003), 275–92, https://doi.org/10.2307/4122570

truth risks being treated as exhausted by what can be translated into sociological terms. The danger, then, is not only that the writer is presented as not knowing what he is doing, but that the work is made to know only what sociology is able to recognise as structure. At this point, the problem begins to exceed the interpretation of Flaubert alone. What is at stake is the more general status Bourdieu accords to literary knowledge. If the literary work is valuable above all because it can be translated into a system of objective relations, then literature is not simply being placed alongside sociology as another way of disclosing the world; it is being completed by sociology and implicitly measured against the standard of scientific intelligibility. This is the point at which the charge of reductionism shades into the broader charge of scientism. Bourdieu may not reduce literature to social causes in any crude sense, but he can seem to subordinate its specific mode of truth to a model of rational knowledge that only science fully realises.

Jacques Leenhardt formulates this objection clearly in an early article entitled, straightforwardly, '*Les Règles de l'art* de P. Bourdieu'. He recognises that Bourdieu's stance towards literature implies a broader theory of knowledge, but argues that it also seems to entail the superiority of sociological understanding:

> la position que prend Bourdieu à l'égard de la littérature engage toute une théorie de la connaissance, et son combat pour la sociologie prend les allures d'un combat contre la littérature dans la mesure où ce qui est en jeu à ses yeux est la sauvegarde de la prééminence du savoir rationnel.[14]

The question Leenhardt puts to Bourdieu is whether or not there are 'plusieurs types ou modalités de savoir'[15]—whether human knowledge and experience may be expressed and communicated in a plurality of forms, each capable of disclosing different dimensions or aspects of the world—which it would be needlessly reductive, and intellectually impoverishing, to subordinate to a single model of rational knowledge.

14 'The position that Bourdieu takes with regard to literature engages a whole theory of knowledge, and his combat *for* sociology takes the appearance of a combat *against* literature insofar as what is at stake in his eyes is to safeguard the pre-eminence of rational knowledge' (trans. J.S.). Jacques Leenhardt, '*Les Règles de l'art* de P. Bourdieu', *French Cultural Studies*, 4 (1993), 263–70 (p. 267), https://doi.org/10.1177/095715589300401207

15 'several types or modalities of knowledge' (trans. J.S.).

'La littérature ne doit pas être comparée à la science', Leenhardt insists, 'mais lui être juxtaposée, dans une analyse englobante de l'arsenal symbolique que se donnent les sociétés, et singulièrement les sociétés modernes qui tendent à la préférer aux représentations plus statiques que leur fournissaient les mythologies religieuses'.[16]

Leenhardt's objection is forceful, but it is also somewhat misleading. The position he opposes to Bourdieu—the idea that literature and science should be understood as distinct symbolic forms, capable of disclosing different dimensions of experience—is in fact close to Bourdieu's own view. As we will see later in this chapter, Bourdieu does not simply oppose literary illusion to scientific truth: he also examines the points at which literature and sociology can borrow from, illuminate, and reinforce one another, without collapsing into a single discourse. Subsequent chapters will extend this argument, by showing that Bourdieu attributes to literature not only cognitive but also political and pedagogical powers. Before we can arrive at that more balanced position, however, we need to confront the reason why Bourdieu's sociology has so often appeared threatening to literary culture. The problem, as we will see, is not only that it seems to privilege science over literature, but that its very mode of understanding takes the form of a demystification, or dismantling, of the beliefs on which literary experience depends. This is why the accusation of scientism so easily becomes a charge of iconoclasm: sociology seems not only to claim superior knowledge of literature, but to call into question the value of literary culture itself.

## 'Le démontage impie de la fiction'

Bourdieu addresses these issues in his discussion of a brief excerpt from Stéphane Mallarmé's 1895 publication *La Musique et les lettres* (*RA*, 450–55). The passage interested him because it appeared to offer something he had not expected to find: a writer's lucid recognition of the *illusio* on which literature depends—the fact that the literary work produces its effects only through a collectively sustained fiction, a 'game' sustained

16 'Literature should not be compared to science, but juxtaposed, in an analysis that encompasses the symbolic arsenals that societies have developed, particularly modern societies which tend to prefer it to the more static representations of religious mythology' (trans. J.S.). Leenhardt, '*Les Règles de l'art* de P. Bourdieu', p. 270.

by writer and reader alike, in which value and meaning are projected onto what, outside the game, would be 'nothing'. 'Quant à la prise de conscience de la logique du jeu en tant que tel, et de l'*illusio* qui est à son fondement', Bourdieu writes, 'j'ai longtemps cru qu'elle était exclue, en quelque sorte, par définition, du fait que cette lucidité ferait de l'entreprise littéraire ou artistique une mystification cynique, ou une supercherie consciente' (*RA*, 450).[17] This admission casts retrospective light on his reading of Flaubert. It suggests that his tendency to explain *L'Éducation sentimentale* as the product of formal labour and practical mastery, rather than of explicit reflexive understanding, may have been shaped by his prior assumption that lucidity about the literary game was almost impossible for those involved in playing it. That it was Mallarmé who forced Bourdieu to revise this assumption must have made the discovery all the more surprising: Mallarmé was one of the names most often invoked in support of the sacred, irreducible, and quasi-mystical status of literature (*RA*, 455 n. 101). To find in Mallarmé himself an apparent recognition of the social logic of literary belief was therefore to discover support in the very place where one might least expect it. This explains why, in an interview with Isabelle Graw, Bourdieu admits to having been 'très content d'avoir trouvé ce texte. C'est comme si j'avais trouvé chez Heidegger un passage où il dise que le monde social explique le conscient'.[18]

The crucial passage is one in which Mallarmé seems to name, from within literary discourse itself, the *leurre* ('cheat' or 'deception', but also 'lure', 'decoy', or 'bait'), on which literary pleasure depends, while hesitating before the impious task of exposing its mechanism publicly:

> Nous savons, captifs d'une formule absolue, que, certes, n'est que ce qui est. Incontinent écarter cependant, sous un prétexte, le leurre, accuserait notre inconséquence, niant le plaisir que nous voulons prendre : car cet

17 'As for becoming aware of the logic of the game as such, and of the *illusio* which is its bedrock, I long believed that this was somehow precluded, by definition, by the fact that this lucidity would turn the literary or artistic enterprise into a cynical mystification or a conscious trickery' (*Rules*, 274).

18 'I was very happy to have found this text. It is as if I had found in Heidegger a passage in which he explains that the social explains the conscious' (trans. J.S.). Pierre Bourdieu and Isabelle Graw, 'Que suis-je ? Une entrevue avec Pierre Bourdieu', trans. by Véronique Gola, first published as 'Ein Interview mit Pierre Bourdieu von Isabelle Graw', *The Thing* (1996), http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/socio/bourdieu/entrevue/quesui.html

> au-delà en est l'agent, et le moteur dirais-je si je ne répugnais à opérer, en public, le démontage impie de la fiction et conséquemment du mécanisme littéraire, pour étaler la pièce principale ou rien. Mais je vénère comment, par une supercherie, on projette, à quelque élévation défendue et de foudre ! le conscient manque chez nous de ce qui là-haut éclate.
>
> À quoi sert cela —
>
> À un jeu.[19]

The potentially scandalous implication, for Bourdieu, is that literature's highest values—its aura of transcendence, its sacredness, its apparent power to carry us beyond ordinary reality—may depend on a collectively sustained fiction. To call literature *un jeu* is not to say that it is trivial, but to deny that its value rests on an intrinsic sacred essence (*RA*, 452–53). This is why exposing the mechanism publicly can appear impious: it risks transforming literary enchantment into a social effect, and aesthetic reverence into a form of collective complicity. The danger is not simply that readers will discover that literature is "only" a game, but that the pleasure they take in the game may depend on not knowing, or at least not saying too openly, that this is what it is. Mallarmé's hesitation before *le démontage impie de la fiction* therefore names exactly the anxiety provoked by Bourdieu's sociology of literature: that exposing the social machinery of belief might weaken the belief itself. This is why, in Bourdieu's reading, Mallarmé gives his exposé a form so oblique and esoteric—especially given that the text was originally delivered in French to an English audience—that the secret remains available only to those capable of deciphering it (*MP*, 17). Mallarmé's text is not a poem, but its prose is markedly poetic: elliptical, metaphorical, syntactically displaced, and resistant to straightforward paraphrase. Mallarmé thus unveils the literary game only in a form that continues to veil it.

19 'We know, captives of an absolute formula that, indeed, there is only that which is. Forthwith to dismiss the cheat, however, on a pretext, would indict our inconsequence, denying the very pleasure we want to take: for that *beyond* is its agent, and even its engine, as I might say were I not loath to perform, in public, the impious dismantling of the fiction and consequently the literary mechanism, to display the principal part or nothing. But I venerate how, by a trick, we project to some forbidden—and thunderous!—height the conscious lack in us of what is bursting up there.
Why should we do this?
It is a game' (quoted and translated in *Rules*, 274).

Moving beyond Mallarmé, however, Bourdieu argues that this disenchantment need not destroy literary pleasure. Mallarmé chose not to expose the literary mechanism in public, as though the game could be preserved only by keeping its truth partly hidden. Bourdieu's wager is different (*MP,* 15). He suggests that a lucid understanding of the game can allow us to participate in it differently: no longer through naïve belief in the sacredness of literature, but through a reflective appreciation of the historical and social necessity embodied in the work. In this sense, sociological demystification would not abolish aesthetic experience but could even intensify it. Here, Bourdieu turns to Spinoza's notion of *amor intellectualis dei*, the intellectual love of God—where God is understood as the necessary order of things, 'the eternal and involuntary cause of everything that exists' (Alfred Weber).[20] For Spinoza, this intellectual love represents the highest form of knowledge: the moment at which the mind understands itself as part of the necessary order of God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) and, through that understanding, participates in nature's understanding of itself. Drawing on this model, and on the Spinozist strain in Durkheimian sociology—condensed in the formula *la société, c'est Dieu* ('society is God')—Bourdieu adapts *amor intellectualis dei* into an *amor intellectualis rei*, an intellectual love of the work:

> l'analyse scientifique, lorsqu'elle est capable de porter au jour ce qui rend l'œuvre d'art *nécessaire,* c'est-à-dire la formule informatrice, le principe générateur, la raison d'être, fournit à l'expérience artistique, et au plaisir qui l'accompagne, sa meilleure justification, son plus riche aliment. À travers elle, l'amour sensible de l'œuvre peut s'accomplir dans une sorte *d'amor intellectualis rei*, assimilation de l'objet au sujet et immersion du sujet dans l'objet littéraire (qui, en plus d'un cas, est lui-même le produit d'une semblable soumission) (*RA*, 15).[21]

When we understand the logic and history behind an author's habitus and the space of possibilities within which their work was composed,

20 Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, 5th edn, trans. by Frank Thilly, from the fifth French edn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), § 55, https://dbanach.com/archive/mickelsen/spinoza.html

21 'scientific analysis, when it is able to uncover what makes the work of art *necessary,* that is to say, its informing formula, its generative principle, its *raison d'être,* also furnishes artistic experience, and the pleasure which accompanies it, with its best justification, its richest nourishment' (*Rules,* xix).

we can also see the necessity objectified in the work, so that the work in turn appears necessary to us. The work no longer seems beautiful, fascinating, or compelling because it floats free of all determination, but because its form appears as the necessary solution to a specific set of historical, social, and artistic constraints—which, if we are inheritors of the same tradition, have also created the need for such works in us.

The impact of Bourdieu's socioanalysis on our experience of literature is clearly more complex than many of the charges of reductionism and scientism suggest. If, as Ahearne argues, 'it seems likely that some of the belief "suspended" for the purposes of understanding may not return, and that the "credit" accorded to the things of culture may thereby be diminished',[22] Bourdieu holds out the prospect of a kind of compensation: an *amor intellectualis* that promises a less alienated relation to legitimate culture and a greater appreciation of the necessity embodied in the work itself. Yet this compensation is not immediate. It comes only after a process of dismantling that can be disenchanting and provoke resistance. To see it through requires perseverance, and more than a little courage, against the grain of both ritualistic celebration and the barbarian impulse to reduce and destroy—which is to say, often against our own spontaneous dispositions. In this sense, Bourdieu can justifiably speak of 'lucidité héroïque' (*MP*, 15).[23]

Flaubert and Mallarmé thus mark different points on a continuum of literary reflexivity in Bourdieu's work. At one pole, Flaubert appears only partially conscious of the social structures whose logic he objectified in his fiction, including the logic of the 'monde économique à l'envers' ('economic world turned upside down') that was becoming established in the literary field (RA, 139). Closer to the other, Mallarmé appears unusually lucid about how the literary world works. His example suggests that participation in the literary game need not preclude a degree of reflexive understanding, even if this does not take the form of scientific knowledge, and that recognising such insight need not entail imputing to writers cynical calculation. Yet this still leaves unresolved the deeper epistemological problem raised by Thomson and Leenhardt. Even Mallarmé, for all his lucidity, does not reveal the mechanisms

22 Jeremy Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The Cultural Policy Thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, and Régis Debray* (University of Warwick: Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, 2004), p. 49.

23 'heroic lucidity' (*Meditations*, 15).

of the literary game in the direct and verifiable form that Bourdieu associates with science. Drawing on poetic metaphors and imagery, he unveils, but he unveils by veiling. The question, then, is how far Bourdieu's distinction between literary veiling and scientific unveiling can be maintained without falling into naïve positivism on one side or sliding into constructivist relativism on the other.

## Fiction and realism

The question of the relation between literature and science was one of the central problems facing French intellectuals from the mid-1960s onwards. This question was brought into sharp focus by changes in the balance of power between the scientific and humanistic disciplines, and by a general political shift in favour of more technical subjects, which were deemed to offer better employment prospects. At first, the shifting balance of power towards the natural sciences, which were becoming the ideal of academic excellence, impelled scholars in the faculty of letters to try to give their work a veneer of scientific rigour. For Bourdieu, this explained what he called 'l'effet -logie', as philosophers, literary scholars, and historians began to borrow the techniques and lexicons of the nearby social sciences, in particular structural linguistics and anthropology, and to adopt a scientific-sounding label ending in *-ique*, *-isme*, or *-logie* (*CD*, 16). In 1964, Roland Barthes published 'Éléments de sémiologie'; in 1967, Jacques Derrida published *De la grammatologie*; in 1969, Michel Foucault published *L'Archéologie du savoir*. For a while, the faculty of letters appeared to have found a way of resisting its subordination to the natural sciences, by borrowing their prestige and appearance of rigour, while preserving the philosophical ambition and public authority traditionally associated with the figure of the intellectual (*HA*, 160–61).

The strategy of accumulating both the symbolic prestige traditionally attached to the intellectual and the authority of science was matched, at the theoretical level, by attempts to overcome the opposition between literature and science, and even to subsume science within an all-encompassing theory of writing (*écriture*). Taking Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics as a model, semiology began to treat other signifying systems—garments, food, cars, furniture—as if they functioned like language. The apparent success of this approach led some to generalise the linguistic

model still further, treating language no longer as one object among others, but as the medium through which social and cultural reality is constituted, organised, and made intelligible. For some, the whole world could be read as a text. Moreover, since reality is never simply given but always mediated by language and representation, even scientific knowledge could be conceived of as a social fiction. Insofar as literature assumed and explored this mediated and fictional character of reality, whereas science tended to ignore its own linguistic and representational conditions, it could reclaim a certain epistemological privilege. As Barthes put it, 'le rôle de la littérature est de représenter activement à l'institution scientifique ce qu'elle refuse, à savoir la souveraineté du langage.'[24]

In this period, Bourdieu largely avoided direct involvement in structuralist and post-structuralist debates, as he worked to establish his own position. It was only in his course of lectures at the Collège de France between 2000–2001, published as *Science de la science et réflexivité*, that he finally struck out against what he called the 'délires "postmodernes"'[25] which, he warned, were sapping public confidence in science, and in social science in particular (*SSR*, 5–6). Bourdieu singles out for criticism a book published in 1979 by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, titled *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*.[26] Drawing especially on the theories of Foucault, Derrida, and Greimas, the authors present their book as 'a first tentative step towards making clear the link between science and literature',[27] the link being that scientific knowledge, like literature, is also produced through practices of inscription and writing. In their account, what counts as a scientific fact is produced through a long process of selection, interpretation, argument, and stabilisation. In this sense, scientists are 'writers and readers in the business of being convinced and convincing others',[28] not simply neutral observers recording a reality that would speak for itself independently of the practices through which it is rendered intelligible. Bourdieu would have agreed—with the crucial

24 'The role of literature is actively to represent to the scientific institution what it refuses, namely the sovereignty of language' (trans. J.S.). Roland Barthes, 'De la science à la littérature', in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), pp. 13–20 (p. 20).

25 '"postmodern" rantings' (*Science*, 1).

26 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979).

27 Ibid., p. 261.

28 Ibid., p. 88.

qualification that those practices are not simply fabrication. For Latour and Woolgar, however, the intelligibility of science relies less on its proximity to an objectively ordered reality against which it can be tested and compared than on the accumulation and organisation of inscriptions through which facts are rendered stable and credible. Thus, they write, 'between scientists and chaos, there is nothing but a wall of archives, labels, protocol books, figures, and papers'.[29]

Moreover, extending the notion of inscriptions to include the data and observations generated by scientific instruments, Latour and Woolgar argue that phenomena are not merely revealed by laboratory apparatus but, in an important sense, constituted through it: 'It is not simply that phenomena depend on certain material instrumentation; rather, the phenomena are thoroughly constituted by the material setting of the laboratory'. Thus, for example, 'the molecular weight of proteins could hardly be said to exist except by virtue of the centrifuge'.[30] Scientific facts, in this view, are inseparable from the material and textual arrangements through which they are produced and recorded. Therefore, the positivist pretence of objective knowledge as the transparent registration of an independently ordered reality is a fiction. 'Bref', Bourdieu summarises, 'la croyance naïvement réaliste des chercheurs en une réalité extérieure au laboratoire est une pure illusion dont seule peut les débarrasser une sociologie réaliste' (*SSR*, 57).[31] Latour and Woolgar seem themselves to have grasped this irony: if scientific knowledge is no more than the product of inscriptional and rhetorical practices, then *Laboratory Life* cannot claim exemption from that condition, but must itself appear as just another constructed narrative. Hence their striking conclusion that their 'own account is no more than *fiction*'.[32]

Against the idea in *Laboratory Life* that there is only chaos beyond the ordering system of language, in *Science de la science et réflexivité* Bourdieu insists that the social world, no less than the natural world of which it is part, possesses its own order, patterns, and regularities. As he puts it, 'il y a du sens, de l'ordre, une logique, bref, quelque chose à comprendre

29 Ibid., p. 245.
30 Ibid., pp. 64–65.
31 'In short, the researchers' naïvely realist belief in a reality external to the laboratory is a pure illusion, from which only a realist sociology can rid them' (*Science*, 27).
32 Ibid., p. 257.

dans le monde, y compris dans le monde social'.[33] It follows that 'l'on ne peut pas dire n'importe quoi à propos du monde ('anything goes', selon la formule chère à Feyerabend), parce que tout et n'importe quoi n'est pas possible dans le monde.'[34] Here, Bourdieu approvingly cites Frege's remark that if everything were in continuous flux and nothing remained fixed, 'il n'y aurait pas de possibilité de connaître le monde et tout serait plongé dans la confusion' (*SSR*, 137–38).[35]

Yet if Bourdieu was concerned in his last series of lectures to affirm the existence of an independent, objective reality, he had himself come close in the past to affirming a radical constructivist position, not so far removed from that of Latour and Woolgar. When Bourdieu resorts to 'as-if thinking' (cf. *MS*, 72), states that 'les fonctions sociales sont des fictions sociales' (*LL*, 49),[36] or writes that 'ultimately, objective relations do not exist and do not really realise themselves except in and through the system of dispositions of the agents, produced by the internalisation of objective conditions',[37] we might well take him for a constructivist.

We can explain Bourdieu's strong and sometimes exclusive emphasis on the constructedness of scientific knowledge in the context of the opposition he was up against. Bourdieu asserts with reference to Gaston Bachelard that 'epistemology is always conjunctural: its propositions and thrust are determined by the principal threat of the moment' (*IRS*, 174). In 1968, that threat came from positivist empiricism. 'En sociologie', we read in *Le Métier de sociologue*, 'l'empirisme occupe, ici et maintenant, le sommet de la hiérarchie des dangers épistémologiques' (*MS*, 95–96).[38] Bourdieu was therefore led to emphasise the steps of "rupture" and "construction" against empiricist positivism. In the context of the growing influence of radical constructivism and postmodernism, however, Bourdieu was

33 'There is meaning, an order, a logic, in short something to be understood in the world, including the social world' (*Science*, 69).

34 'one cannot say whatever one likes about the world ("anything goes", in Feyerabend's phrase), because "anything and everything" is not possible in the world.' Ibid.

35 'there would no longer be any possibility of getting to know anything about the world and everything would be plunged in confusion.' Ibid.

36 'social functions are social fictions' (trans. J.S.). Pierre Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1982), p. 49.

37 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', *Social Research*, 35 (1968), 681–706 (p. 705).

38 'in sociology, here and now, empiricism ranks highest in the hierarchy of epistemological dangers' (*Craft*, 69).

brought more strongly to affirm the relation between scientific models and objective reality. What may look like a theoretical reversal is therefore better understood as a displacement of emphasis: against positivism, he insisted that facts are constructed; against constructivist relativism, that constructions are constructions of something.

In fact, Bourdieu's position consistently held together both propositions: knowledge is socially and historically constructed, but it is constructed in relation to a reality that is not itself a mere construction, which resists arbitrariness and makes some representations more adequate than others. Already in 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge' (1968), for instance, he cited the introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* against those who would 'deny the social world the immanent necessity they recognize in the natural one', and the quantum physicist Gustave Juvet to say: 'in the rushing flux of phenomena, in the ever changeable reality, the physicist observes something permanent'.[39] Like a sort of social physicist, the sociologist's task is to discover, beneath the shifting surface of social life, the invariant relations and hidden principles that account for its observable forms and transformations.

For all his interest in the relations between literature and science, then, Bourdieu insists that they should not be simply conflated or folded into one another. The crux of their difference lies in their relation to the "real". As we have seen, in the case of literature this reference is "denied" and "veiled": fiction does not present itself as a discourse of direct reference, but refracts the real through invented characters, situations, and plots, so that what is objectively at stake appears only in transfigured form. As such, it avoids the responsibility of having to answer directly for the truth of what it says about the world. In contrast, Bourdieu writes:

> Le discours scientifique se distingue du discours de fiction — du roman, par exemple, qui se donne plus ou moins ouvertement pour un discours feint et fictif — en ce que, comme le remarque John Searle, il veut dire ce qu'il dit, il prend au sérieux ce qu'il dit et accepte d'en répondre, c'est-à-dire, le cas échéant, d'être convaincu d'erreur (*HA*, 43).[40]

39 Bourdieu, 'Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge', pp. 683, 689.

40 'Scientific discourse is distinct from the discourse of *fiction*—from the novel, for instance, which passes itself off more or less openly as a feigned and fictitious discourse—in that, as John Searle remarks, it *means* what it says, it takes seriously what it says and accepts responsibility for it, that is, if the case arises, for its mistakes' (*Homo Academicus*, 28).

This distinction between science and fiction is crucial. Bourdieu is not returning here to a naïve positivism, as though scientific discourse simply copied the real without mediation, construction, or rhetoric. Scientific knowledge, for him, is always constructed: it depends on concepts, models, instruments, methods, and collective procedures of verification. But unlike fiction, it must present its constructions as accountable to a reality that can resist them—to be corrected, contradicted, or refuted. Literature, by contrast, may disclose real structures with extraordinary force, but it does so under the protection of fiction, or under the cover of form: it can make us see and feel social truth without having to assume the same explicit responsibility for stating it. Its relation to reality is therefore not weaker than that of science, but different in kind. It is oblique, denegated, and transfiguring, whereas scientific discourse seeks to make explicit the principles of its construction and to expose them to the arbitration of the real.

It is important to remember that Bourdieu is not describing an eternal opposition between two essences called "science" and "literature". For him, both are historically constituted practices, formed within relatively autonomous fields. The process of autonomisation and differentiation we traced in Chapter 3, which slowly defined the modern writer as a distinct social personage, also operates at the level of the work as an 'abstracteur de quintessence' (*RA*, 231): it selects, concentrates, and radicalises the properties that distinguish literature from other forms of symbolic production. In the French literary field, this process has taken the form of a progressive purification of everything that can be separated from form: first external functions such as moral instruction, political commitment, or commercial success; then inherited narrative conventions, psychological depth, and referential transparency; and, in the limit case of the *Nouveau Roman* and writers such as Claude Simon, plot and character themselves (*RA*, 395–96). Literature has thus come to define its own historically produced essence: a specific way of suspending, transforming, and refracting reference, irreducible to the moral, political, commercial, scientific and other forms of construction from which it has differentiated itself. Science, by contrast, has developed according to a different logic: the explicit construction of models, the submission of claims to verification and criticism, and the acceptance of possible refutation. Their different relations to reality should therefore

not be understood as expressions of timeless essences called "literature" and "science", but as the products of distinct histories of autonomisation.

Against the frequent charge that Bourdieu's sociology of literature is reductive or even destructive, therefore, it may be said that it is grounded, on the contrary, in an acute sensitivity to the specific difference between literary and scientific practice. What separates literature from science is not that one is mediated while the other simply copies the real, or that one is fictional while the other alone has access to truth. Rather, each has developed its own way of regulating the relation between construction, belief, reference, and reality. This distinction also helps us to qualify the charge of scientism. Bourdieu certainly accords science a privileged capacity for explicit objectivation and verification, but he does not therefore treat literature simply as failed science, or as a confused anticipation of sociology. Precisely because literature does not answer to the real in the same way as science, he does not measure fiction against the norms of scientific truth. Nor does he dissolve its specificity into a set of external determinants. He seeks instead to grasp the distinctive mode of disclosure made possible by the relative autonomy of the literary field: a mode in which reality can be refracted, transfigured, and made sensible through literary forms. The relative autonomy of the literary field is what enables fiction to suspend the illusion of direct reference while still producing forms of perception and intelligibility that sociology itself may have reason to take seriously.

## Crossovers

So far, we have kept social science and literature relatively distinct, in order to clarify the terms of their relation and the specific modes of objectification each makes possible. Yet like the boundaries between fields, which often blend into one another and are themselves uncertain or contested, the line separating sociology from literature is not absolute. Once their respective specificities have been established, it becomes possible to examine more precisely the points at which they meet, overlap, and draw on one another. What follows is an examination of these crossovers in both directions. First, we will see how Bourdieu himself drew on literary techniques in order to render social complexity more adequately. We will then consider the reverse movement: how writers such as Annie Ernaux have taken up

Bourdieu's sociology as both a legitimation and a resource for their own practice. The result is not a collapse of the distinction between literature and sociology, but a clearer sense of their possible complementarity.

Given his reputation for writing turgid prose, the idea that Bourdieu could have borrowed from literary writers may seem surprising. Yet in several places he explicitly acknowledges that he had found in literary techniques solutions to problems internal to sociological writing itself. In reflecting on his work on Flaubert, for instance, Bourdieu describes having 'stumbled upon many problems—and solutions—that he [Flaubert] had himself encountered, such as that of the combined use of direct style, indirect style, and free indirect style which lies at the heart of the problem of transcription and publication of interviews' (*IRS*, 208). We can find a good example of Bourdieu's use of these techniques in his commentary on his interview with 'un jeune cadre qui "sait vivre"' in *La Distinction*, in which he switches artfully between direct citation, reported speech, and periphrasis (*D*, 340–44). By moving between these modes of discourse, Bourdieu is able to preserve something of the cadence and social texture of the interviewee's speech while at the same time situating it analytically, allowing the reader to perceive both the speaker's self-presentation and the social logic inscribed within it.

Bourdieu also seems to have drawn inspiration from Proust, whose complex sentence structures are crafted to reflect the complexity of reality:

> Je pense que, la qualité littéraire du style mise de côté, ce que Spitzer dit du style de Proust, je pourrais le dire de mon écriture. Il dit que, premièrement, ce qui est complexe ne se laisse dire que de façon complexe; que, deuxièmement, la réalité n'est pas seulement complexe, mais aussi structurée, hiérarchisée, et qu'il faut donner l'idée de cette structure: si l'on veut tenir le monde dans toute sa complexité et en même temps hiérarchiser et articuler, mettre en perspective, mettre au premier plan ce qui est important, etc., il faut recourir à ces phrases lourdement articulées, que l'on doit pratiquement reconstruire comme les phrases latines; que, troisièmement, cette réalité complexe et structurée, Proust ne veut pas la livrer telle quelle, mais en donnant simultanément son point de vue par rapport à elle, en disant comment il se situe par rapport à elle, en disant comment il se situe par rapport à ce qu'il décrit (*CD*, 67).[41]

41 'I think that, literary and stylistic qualities apart, what Spitzer says about Proust's style is something I could say about my own writing. He says, firstly, that what is complex can only be said in a complex way; secondly, that reality is not only

This comparison helps to clarify what is at stake in Bourdieu's own difficult style. His long, heavily articulated sentences are not simply the effect of obscurity or scholastic self-protection, although they can certainly produce that impression. They are also an attempt to hold together several demands at once: to register the complexity of social reality, to show that this complexity is structured and hierarchised, to place different forces and determinations in perspective, and to mark the analyst's own position in relation to what he describes. Through qualifications, subordinate clauses, reversals, and shifts in emphasis, Bourdieu's prose tries to give syntactic form to an object that is itself relational, stratified, and overdetermined. What can appear merely cumbersome may therefore also be read as an effort to find a form adequate to the social world it seeks to analyse.

Literary authors also seem to have inspired Bourdieu's use of polyonomasia: the multiplication of perspectives on the same person, object, or social reality. Bourdieu associates this technique with writers such as Woolf, Faulkner, Joyce, and Flaubert, whose works unsettle the fixed and unitary gaze of the observer and bring us closer to the reality of coexisting, often competing points of view (*MM*, 9–10; *HA*, 42–43). *La Misère du monde* offers a sociological equivalent of this procedure. Bourdieu and his collaborators place side by side interview accounts bearing on the same institutions and social realities—schooling, housing estates, family conflict, precarious work, immigration, bureaucratic humiliation—without reducing them to a single authoritative narrative. The same world appears differently according to the position occupied within it: teacher or pupil, judge or defendant, social worker or client, parent or child, native-born or immigrant. What emerges is not a unified account, but a socially structured plurality of views on the same object.

Another lesson Bourdieu drew from literature concerns narrative

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complex, but also structured, hierarchically ordered, and that you have to give an idea of this structure: if you want to hold the world in all its complexity and at the same time order and articulate it, show it in perspective, bring what's important into the foreground and so on, you have to use heavily articulated sentences that can be practically reconstructed like Latin sentences; thirdly, he says that Proust does not want to reveal this complex structured reality just as it is, but to present us simultaneously with the point of view from which he sees it, telling us where he locates himself in relation to what he is describing' (*Other Words*, 51).

temporality. Bourdieu came to see the non-linear narratives of Woolf, Faulkner, Claude Simon, and Robbe-Grillet as 'closer to the truth of temporal experience' and 'anthropologically more truthful' than the conventional life stories written by sociologists and anthropologists, which were themselves influenced by the tradition of linear narratives with which these writers had sought to break (*IRS*, 207).[42] 'C'est pourquoi', Bourdieu writes, 'il est logique de demander assistance à ceux qui ont eu à rompre avec cette tradition sur le terrain même de son accomplissement exemplaire' (*RP*, 83).[43] An example of Bourdieu applying a comparable perspective can be found in 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur'. There he observes that Alain Robbe-Grillet's understanding of his own work had changed significantly over time: whereas in 1953 he described *Les Gommes* as 'un roman descriptif et scientifique',[44] by 1961 he was claiming that the descriptions in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie* are always made by someone, are 'parfaitement subjectives', and that this subjectivity had always been the defining characteristic of the *Nouveau Roman*.[45] Bourdieu suggests that this later self-understanding was informed, and indeed transformed, by the image of his work projected back to him by critics, which contributed to modify the author's own conception of his project and its subsequent development.[46] Robbe-Grillet's later reinterpretation of his earlier novels thus shows that a creative project is not the unfolding of an original, fully formed intention already present at the outset, but something progressively shaped through the interplay between the work, its reception, and the author's subsequent self-understanding.

Like Robbe-Grillet in his novels, then, Bourdieu resists a linear and

42 Bourdieu's main discussion of non-linear narrative appears in 'Une théorie en acte de la lecture', his commentary on Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' at the end of *Les Règles de l'art*. He reads the story's disordered chronology as a reflexive device: it forces the reader to reconstruct events retrospectively, then to recognise how their own assumptions and expectations made that reconstruction possible. In this reading, Faulkner's story is not only temporally discontinuous, but a practical theory of reading itself. See John Speller, 'Reading and Reflexivity: Bourdieu's Faulkner', *Paragraph*, 35.1 (2012), 83–96, https://doi.org/10.3366/para.2012.0043

43 'this is why it is logical to turn for assistance to those who have broken with this tradition on the very terrain of its exemplary accomplishment' (trans. J.S.).

44 'a descriptive and scientific novel' (trans. J.S.).

45 'perfectly subjective' (trans. J.S.).

46 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les Temps Modernes*, 246 (1966), 865–906 (pp. 877–80).

self-identical account of creative development, emphasising instead the shifting, recursive temporality through which agents reinterpret their earlier practice and, in doing so, orient their future action. The similarity here lies less in a shared style than in a shared refusal of the idea that a work possesses, from the outset, a fixed and unitary sense. In both cases, what a work means is continually redefined through the sequence of its readings and re-readings. But whereas Robbe-Grillet makes this instability perceptible through formal discontinuities, repetitions, and shifts of perspective, Bourdieu reconstructs it analytically, showing how the meaning of a work is transformed through its reception and through the author's own retrospective reinterpretations of his project.

Interestingly, towards the end of *Les Règles* there is a section titled 'Da capo. L'illusion et l'*illusio*', which invites the reader to look back over the book and reinterpret it in light of the opposition, precisely, between science and literature. The effect of reading, the text suggests, is not simply cumulative but retrospective: we are brought to reflect on what we have already read with a transformed understanding of what was at stake. The procedure is comparable to the retroactive effect produced by Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily', where the final revelation forces the reader to reinterpret earlier details that had seemed merely descriptive, incidental, or opaque. In both cases, meaning is not given all at once, but reorganised after the fact by a later disclosure that changes the status of what came before. In *Les Règles*, that disclosure is the concept of *illusio*, which requires us to rethink the opposition between science and literature that had structured our prior reading: not as a simple opposition between truth and illusion, but as a relation between two social games, each sustained by an investment in its own conventions, categories, and historically constituted schemes of perception, and each producing its own relation to the "real" (*RA,* 540).

Literature can also provide sociology with a more penetrating view of its object. A striking example is Bourdieu's use of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* to elucidate the structures of masculine domination within the family in *La Domination masculine*. Bourdieu's reading of Woolf makes no attempt to reconstruct the author's point of view, position, or trajectory. Indeed, the epistemological vector appears to run in the opposite direction: it is not sociological theory that provides new insight into the literary text, but the literary text that gives the sociologist a fresh

perspective. Once again, Bourdieu attributes this power to the writer's work on form:

> Il fallait toute l'acuité de Virginia Woolf et l'infini raffinement de son écriture pour pousser l'analyse jusqu'aux effets les mieux cachés d'une forme de domination qui est inscrite dans tout l'ordre social et opère dans l'obscurité des corps, à la fois enjeux et principes de son efficacité (*DM*, 113).[47]

Woolf's formal labour enables her to break with stereotyped representations and to bring into view structures of symbolic power and violence that usually remain hidden, misrecognised, or denied. This is not because fiction offers a more immediate access to reality than sociology, but because its oblique and formalised mode of presentation can make perceptible aspects of experience that explicit theoretical discourse may miss or flatten. Bourdieu notes that Woolf herself was aware of this paradox, writing in *The Pargiters*, 'I prefer, where truth is important, to write fiction', and in *A Room of One's Own*, 'fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact' (*DM*, 98 n. 20).[48]

Several commentators have made their own comparisons and connections between Bourdieu and literary authors. Alain Caillé considers Bourdieu's work to be a sort of sociological continuation of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*.[49] Both are fascinated by struggles for advancement, recognition, and legitimacy, by the interplay of material and symbolic power, and by the gap between the stories agents tell about themselves and the deeper social logic of their conduct. Balzac's world is one of climbing, decline, consecration, rivalry, symbolic display, and social misrecognition. In Bourdieu's terms, agents struggle for economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, they seek legitimacy, distinction, and recognition, and they misrecognise the arbitrariness of the rules they live by. The main difference, of course, is that Balzac presents a

47 'It took all the insight of Virginia Woolf and the infinite refinement of her writing to pursue the analysis into the best-concealed effects of a form of domination which is inscribed in the whole social order and operates in the obscurity of bodies, which are both the stakes and the principles of its efficacy' (*Masculine Domination*, 81).

48 Bourdieu cites Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 9, and *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1935), p. 7.

49 Alain Caillé, 'Esquisse d'une critique de l'économie générale de la pratique', *Cahiers du LASA*, 12–13 (1992), 109–220 (p. 113).

fictionalised social world through invented characters and plots, whereas Bourdieu analyses an actually existing one through surveys, interviews, and other forms of empirical inquiry. Caillé's comparison therefore suggests not that Bourdieu writes like Balzac, but that he pursues, in scientific form, an analogous ambition to map an entire social world in its divisions, struggles, illusions, and forms of power.

Gérard Mauger finds a similarity between the writing styles of Bourdieu and Claude Simon: 'même longueur des phrases, même multiplication des incises — digressions, associations, homologies — même recherche du mot juste et de l'énoncé ajusté au plus près'.[50] The comparison with Claude Simon has a basis similar to the one Bourdieu himself invokes in relation to Proust. In both cases, the long, heavily articulated sentence appears not as a mere stylistic mannerism, but as an attempt to do justice to a reality apprehended as irreducibly complex, structured, and perspectival. Mauger's phrase about the 'recherche du mot juste et de l'énoncé ajusté au plus près' is also important. The affinity here lies in a shared ethic of exactitude, one that also recalls Flaubert's famous search for *le mot juste*. Like Flaubert and Simon, Bourdieu appears to labour against approximation, trying to produce formulations fitted as closely as possible to what they describe. The comparison should not obscure the obvious differences of genre and purpose, but it does suggest that his prose is similarly governed by a refusal of simplification and by a use of syntax as an instrument of precision.

Such comparisons will not convince everyone, and there are counterarguments. David Swartz sees Bourdieu's prose style as a reaction 'designed to shatter the notion of excellence as a sort of natural ability' in a country 'where clarity of expression (*la clarté*) is elevated to a national virtue, where it is seen as truly a mark of natural talent and intelligence'.[51] According to this interpretation, Bourdieu's style contains an implicit rejection of the politically laden *belle prose* associated with graduates of the École normale supérieure. Certainly, Bourdieu's writing appears 'worked' rather than fluent, effortful rather

50 'the same sentence length, the same multiplication of parenthetical insertions—digressions, associations, homologies—the same search for the right word and for the formulation "adjusted as closely as possible"' (trans. J.S.). Gérard Mauger, 'Lire Pierre Bourdieu', *Politis*, 686 (2002), 26–27 (p. 26).

51 David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 13.

than effortless; but the extent to which this was a deliberate strategy, as opposed to a consequence of his own position as an outsider—a largely self-taught petit-bourgeois from the provinces—is difficult to determine. The density and effortfulness of Bourdieu's prose may owe as much to a hard-won relation to language and intellectual authority as to any conscious rejection of *belle prose*.

We can also see Bourdieu's writing style as an attempt to demarcate his work from literature, and to mark its scientific rigour and seriousness. This suggestion is supported by an analysis in *Homo academicus*, in which Bourdieu charts reflexively *l'espace des styles* ('space of styles') available to the scientist, historian, or philosopher, with literature as one of its central points of reference (*HA*, 45–46). Bourdieu's own style can thus be understood as a way of positioning himself within this space of possibilities: by adopting a difficult, heavily articulated, and visibly laborious prose, he marks a distance from literature as something perceived as frivolous or insufficiently rigorous, and aligns himself instead with the symbolic seriousness conventionally attached to science. In other words, the issue is not only one of personal temperament or expressive habit, but of symbolic efficacy within the academic field. As Bourdieu often cited Spinoza as saying, 'bien qu'il n'y ait pas de force intrinsèque de la vérité, il y a une force de la croyance dans la vérité, de la croyance que produit l'apparence de la vérité' (*HA*, 44).[52] Bourdieu may have felt the need to write in a recognisably "scientific" manner so that his research would acquire the symbolic authority needed to command serious attention.

In the later phases of his career, when his position was more firmly established—as a professor at the Collège de France and an internationally renowned academic—Bourdieu became more willing to experiment with literary forms and modes of presentation. The richest example is *La Misère du monde* (1993), which includes some of his most conspicuous attempts to combine sociological analysis with literary presentation. Its interview transcripts are framed by short introductory texts written in a plain, almost realist prose, while the interviews themselves are reproduced at unusual length and with minimal reworking. In both respects, Bourdieu sought to combine the immediacy and emotional force of literary presentation with the cognitive rigour of

52 'although truth has no intrinsic force, there is an intrinsic force of belief in truth, of belief which produces the appearance of truth' (*Homo Academicus*, 29).

sociology. This is especially clear in the interviews, whose direct speech gives dramatic intensity to the often brutal experiences and living conditions of the interviewees. They can reach, as Bourdieu writes, 'une intensité dramatique et une force émotionnelle proche de celle du texte littéraire' (*MM*, 922).[53] At times, the format is almost theatrical. In the interview 'Avec un dealer portoricain de Harlem', for instance, Bourdieu even includes what look like stage directions: 'ce coin en plus est frustrant, tu sais [aspirant alors de la cocaïne et secouant la tête]' (*MM*, 211–17).[54] As in theatre, the aim is not simply to state or explain, but to make social situations present with enough force to solicit the reader's imaginative and affective participation. Such physical details give the interview a dramatic force that can disturb the reader's habitual categories of judgement, encouraging them to see even drug abuse not as an isolated moral failing but, at least in this case, as embedded in a wider set of social conditions. In this way, the interview helps produce the 'conversions de la pensée et du regard' that Bourdieu presents as a frequent precondition of understanding (*MM*, 922).

Yet *La Misère du monde* remains, for all its dramatic and emotional force, a strikingly solemn book. As Günter Grass remarked to Bourdieu when they met in 1999,[55] 'il n'y a pas d'humour dans ce genre de livre. Il manque le comique de l'échec, qui joue un grand rôle dans mes histoires, les absurdités découlant de certaines confrontations'.[56] Grass does not suggest that we should make light of the situations depicted and analysed in *La Misère du monde*, which involve very real suffering. His point, rather, is that tragedy is not incompatible with comedy. He cites examples from the literary tradition, including Voltaire's *Candide* and Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*: 'Ce sont des livres où les conditions sociales décrites sont également affreuses. N'empêche que même dans la douleur et l'échec, la capacité humaine d'être comique et, dans ce

53 'a dramatic intensity and an emotional force close to those of a literary text' (*Weight of the World*, 623).

54 'That place is frustrating you know [sniffing more cocaine and shaking his head]' (*Weight of the World*, 433).

55 Pierre Bourdieu and Günter Grass, 'La tradition "d'ouvrir sa gueule"', *Le Monde*, 3 December 1999.

56 'There is no humour in such books. The comedy of failure, which plays such an important role in my stories, is missing—the absurdities arising from certain confrontations.' Pierre Bourdieu and Günter Grass, 'The "Progressive" Restoration', *New Left Review*, 14 (2002), 63–77 (p. 64).

sens, victorieux s'impose'.[57] Laughter in the face of tragedy (what Beckett calls the *risus purus*, 'the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy')[58] can disrupt the solemn authority of dominant ways of seeing, loosening the grip of taboos and inherited reverence, and opening the way to a different apprehension of social reality. In this sense, it may even become a form of defiance. Bourdieu, however, resists the idea that such comic effects should have a place in his own writing, and even suggests that they would be inappropriate given the gravity of the realities he sought to expose: 'On nous dit: vous n'êtes pas drôles. Mais l'époque n'est vraiment pas drôle ! Vraiment, il n'y a pas de quoi rire'.[59] Here Bourdieu clearly comes down on the side of seriousness, though Grass's remarks leave open the possibility that comic effects can also serve truth, even in the representation of tragic realities.

At the same time, Bourdieu's writing often produces what Ahearne describes as an almost automatic effect of 'quasi-Flaubertian irony',[60] which breaks through especially in the transcripts of his conference speeches and interviews. A good example, for our purposes, is Bourdieu's wry description of symbolic exchanges among writers and intellectuals—prefaces, endorsements, acts of consecration—which acquire their ironic force from the discrepancy between their elevated self-presentation as generosity, homage, or pure recognition and the logic of capital and interest that underlies them:

> Mauriac écrivant une préface à un livre de Sollers : l'aîné célèbre écrit une préface et transmet du capital symbolique, et en même temps, il manifeste sa capacité de découvreur et sa générosité de protecteur de la jeunesse qu'il reconnaît et qui se reconnaît en lui [...] Lévi-Strauss écrit une préface à l'œuvre de Mauss par laquelle il s'approprie le capital symbolique de l'auteur de *l'Essai sur le Don*. Je vous laisse réfléchir sur tout ça.[61]

57 'Voltaire's *Candide* or Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, for example, are books in which the circumstances of the time are also appalling, and yet the human ability to present a comic and, in this sense, victorious figure, even through pain and failure, perseveres.' Bourdieu and Grass, 'The "Progressive" Restoration', p. 65.

58 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 48.

59 'we're told we lack humour. But the times aren't funny! There's really nothing to laugh about.' Bourdieu and Grass, 'The "Progressive" Restoration', p. 65.

60 Jeremy Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The Cultural Policy Thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Régis Debray* (Coventry: Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, 2004), p. 69.

61 'Mauriac writing a preface to a book by Sollers: the famous elder writes a preface and transmits symbolic capital, and at the same time manifests his talent as a

Bourdieu does not quite draw the conclusion for his audience, but leaves the examples to do their own demystifying work. The effect is dryly ironic, since we are invited to see through acts experienced, or at least presented, as noble gestures of homage, generosity, and intellectual filiation, and to recognise the disavowed self-interests they also serve.

Bourdieu also saw the reflexive analysis of *Homo academicus* as having a possible comic dimension. There, he analyses the French university system, including his own position within it, producing a strange doubling effect in which the analyst himself becomes an object of analysis. To illustrate the oddity of this situation, Bourdieu evokes David Garnett's short story *A Man in the Zoo*, whose protagonist, after an argument with his girlfriend, offers himself as an exhibit in the local zoo and is placed in a cage with a chimpanzee beneath a sign requesting visitors 'not to tease the man with personal remarks'. The comparison captures the peculiar reflexive risk of the book: Bourdieu enters his own cage, submitting himself to public scrutiny and to the potentially comic discomfort of being analysed in the same terms as the other agents in the field. 'Grâce à moi, avec moi', Bourdieu comments, '*l'Homo classificateur* est tombé dans ses propres classements. Je trouve ça plutôt comique. Je crois que mon livre devrait faire beaucoup rire' (*I*, 192).[62] Whether many readers did in fact find it amusing is another matter.

The exchange also operates in the opposite direction. If Bourdieu drew on literary techniques to solve problems of sociological representation, writers have in turn drawn on his sociology as a resource for literary practice. Several of the interviews in *La Misère du monde* were adapted for the stage by Didier Bezace in *Le Jour et la nuit* in 1998, and Günter Grass admits to having been tempted to mine the book for raw material, suggesting that sociological research can itself become an inspiration for literary invention. If there is a Bourdieusian literary writer, however, it is undoubtedly Annie Ernaux, author of *Les Armoires vides*, *La Honte*,

discoverer and his generosity as a protector of young writers whom he recognises and who recognise themselves in him [...] Lévi-Strauss writes a preface to a work by Mauss through which he appropriates the symbolic capital of the author of *The Gift*. I leave you to reflect on all that' (trans. J.S.). Pierre Bourdieu, 'Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 145 (2002), 3–8, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.2002.2793

62 'Thanks to me, and with me, "Homo classifier" has fallen into his own classifications. I find this somewhat comic, and I believe that my book should raise a good laugh' (*Political Interventions*, 150).

and *La Place*. Ernaux has spoken frequently of Bourdieu's influence on her writing, including in the obituary she wrote for *Le Monde*.[63] This influence extends to the very subject matter of her works: 'ce que je dois à Bourdieu, [...] c'est une injonction à prendre comme matière d'écriture ce qui jusque-là m'avait paru "au-dessous de la littérature"'.[64] Bourdieu's example seems to have encouraged Ernaux to do in literature something analogous to what he had done in sociology: to take social shame, domination, class displacement, and socially repressed experience as legitimate objects of representation, at a time when the dominant literary tendency pointed rather towards formal experiment, above all in the mode of the *Nouveau Roman*.

Ernaux goes so far as to describe her genre as 'autosociobiographie' and, writing of *La Place*, she comments: 'j'ai voulu travailler comme un ethnologue'.[65] She even developed a literary equivalent of Bourdieu's *distance objectivante* ('objectifying distance') in what she prefers to call 'l'écriture distanciée' (plutôt que 'plate')'.[66] In stylistic terms, however, the resemblance should not be overstated. Bourdieu's writing is conceptually dense, heavily articulated, and explicitly analytical; it seeks to make structures, relations, and determinations intelligible. Ernaux's prose, by contrast, is stripped down and deliberately restrained, aiming not at conceptual elaboration but at a distanced, quasi-documentary presentation of experience and events. Although she occasionally uses concepts associated with Bourdieu, such as *domination* and *violence symbolique* (symbolic violence), in her writing, she herself stresses that her works are rooted in 'des scènes vécues, des choses vues, des phrases entendues' and are not abstract analysis.[67] For that very reason, Ernaux's writing can stand alongside Bourdieu's sociology as

63 Annie Ernaux, 'Bourdieu : le chagrin', *Le Monde*, 5 February 2002.

64 'What I owe to Bourdieu [...] is an injunction to take as the matter of my writing what had previously seemed to me "beneath literature"' (trans. J.S.). Annie Ernaux, 'La preuve par corps', in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2010), pp. 23–28 (p. 26).

65 'I wanted to work like an ethnologist' (trans. J.S.). Isabelle Charpentier, '"Quelque part entre la littérature, la sociologie et l'histoire..."', *COnTEXTES*, 1 (2006), https://doi.org/10.4000/contextes.74

66 'he helped me to conceive of what I call "writing from a distance" rather than "flat writing"' (trans. J.S.). Annie Ernaux, 'La preuve par corps', p. 27.

67 'lived scenes, things seen, phrases heard' (trans. J.S.). Thierry Poyet and Fabrice Thumerel, eds, *L'Autobiographie selon Annie Ernaux*, *L'École des lettres*, second cycle, 9 (Paris: EDL, 2002–2003), p. 25.

its literary counterpart, giving concrete form to social realities that his work often renders more conceptually. A striking example is Ernaux's characterisation of her working-class father in *La Place*—his shame at his accent, his constant fear 'd'être déplacé', his leitmotiv 'il ne faut pas péter plus haut qu'on l'a'—which offers a vivid literary instantiation of what Bourdieu describes as the habitus-based sense of one's place, whereby agents internalise social limits and shrink back from what seems beyond their reach (cf. *D*, 549).[68]

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This chapter has focused on the relation between literature and science in Bourdieu's work: on the different kinds of knowledge they produce, the different forms of objectification they make possible, and the points at which they can borrow from and illuminate one another. Chapter 5 extends these epistemological, formal, and stylistic questions by asking how literary narratives and techniques can be put to political use. For Bourdieu, literature's political force lies not only in its capacity to represent suffering or communicate critical ideas, but in its formal and aesthetic power to change how the social world is perceived, experienced, and judged. The next chapter therefore examines how literature may be used to challenge official language, disturb settled preconceptions, and make other futures imaginable.

68 *D'être déplacé*: literally, 'to be out of place' or 'socially out of place'. *Il ne faut pas péter plus haut qu'on l'a*: roughly, 'don't get above yourself' (trans. J.S.). Annie Ernaux, *La Place* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), pp. 58–61.

# 5. Literature and Cultural Politics

In the final decade of his career, Pierre Bourdieu emerged as a prominent figure on the French political stage, entering the tradition of engaged intellectuals associated with Émile Zola, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Michel Foucault. His political interventions did not consist only of public letters, petitions, speeches, and articles. Some were conceived as symbolic actions closer to satire and parody, making use of techniques more usually associated with literature and literary criticism: irony, pastiche, montage, mimicry, exaggeration, and comic reversal. This chapter explains the role that Bourdieu saw for critical intellectuals—including writers and artists—in counteracting the symbolic violence that sustains relations of domination by making them appear natural, reasonable, or inevitable. It begins by tracing Bourdieu and Boltanski's analysis in *La production de l'idéologie dominante* of how political discourse is structured, circulated, and naturalised. It then shows how their Flaubertian parody of an *Encyclopédie des idées reçues* uses literary effects to interrupt the self-evidence of that discourse. The chapter next turns to Bourdieu's later critiques of neoliberal language, where similar procedures become weapons against the authorised language of economic and political power. Finally, it examines Bourdieu's attempts to create or reinforce the organisational conditions for collective interventions by writers, artists, and intellectuals, including on an international scale, and considers why his most ambitious projects—among them *Liber* and his involvement in the International Parliament of Writers—ultimately failed.

## The production of the dominant ideology

In 1976, Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski published a long article in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the journal Bourdieu had founded the previous

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year, entitled 'La production de l'idéologie dominante'.[1] Although Bourdieu would later distance himself from the term "ideology", on the grounds that it carried too many misleading associations with theories of consciousness and therefore could not adequately account for embodied forms of practice (*MP*, 216), this early text remains crucial for understanding important aspects of his later political interventions. For the purposes of this chapter, the essay is especially useful because it clarifies Bourdieu's interest in cultural politics: the role played by cultural producers and cultural works—including writers and literary texts—in ideological struggles over the meaning and direction of social history, or, in his later terminology, *luttes symboliques* ('symbolic struggles'). The significance and continuing relevance of the 1976 essay were confirmed when Raisons d'agir, the independent publishing house Bourdieu co-founded in the late 1990s, republished 'La production de l'idéologie dominante' in book form in 2008.[2]

*La production de l'idéologie dominante* begins by discussing what Bourdieu and Boltanski call the *discours dominant* ('dominant discourse'): a discourse that had achieved ideological supremacy by the 1960s, and that was inculcated and consecrated in institutions such as the École nationale d'administration and the Institut d'études politiques de Paris. This discourse was generated by a system of classifications and schemes of thought and action—something akin to a 'generative grammar', in Chomsky's sense—which oriented the judgements and opinions of the elite. It is this underlying system that Bourdieu and Boltanski call *l'idéologie dominante* ('dominant ideology'). The dominant discourse is composed of elements drawn from this structure and combined according to its rules. What results is a chain of commonplaces and received ideas that those versed in the dominant ideology are able to produce fluently, without conscious reflection on the generative rules and underlying assumptions that make such utterances possible.

Bourdieu and Boltanski next present an 'Encyclopédie des idées reçues et des lieux communs en usage dans les lieux neutres'

1 Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski, 'La production de l'idéologie dominante', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2.2–3 (1976), 3–73, https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1976.3443

2 Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski, *La production de l'idéologie dominante* (Paris: Raisons d'agir éditions, 2008). References will be to this edition.

('Encyclopaedia of Received Ideas and Commonplaces in Use in Neutral Spaces')—an evident pastiche of Gustave Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, in which Flaubert catalogues the banalities and automatic turns of phrase circulating in polite nineteenth-century society. Bourdieu and Boltanski's *Encyclopédie* gathers exemplary formulations of the ideas most frequently expressed on the subjects most commonly invoked in dominant discourse, drawn from several dozen books, interviews, and articles, and arranged alphabetically with cross-references. It then serves as a point of reference throughout *La production de l'idéologie dominante*, whenever one of the elite's recurrent preoccupations or habitual opinions (its *idées reçues*) is invoked, usually in inverted commas (*ID*, 17–22).

Bourdieu and Boltanski insist on the scientificity of the *Encyclopédie*, to which they append a three-page methodological explanation and a full bibliography. Nonetheless, they were clearly having some fun, as shown by the gratuitous mock title page, printed in nineteenth-century style and complete with crest and publication date in Roman numerals (*ID*, 15). Even without these gestures, as the authors themselves observe, isolating the most recognisable features of what is supposed to pass as a *discours d'importance* ('discourse of importance') produces an almost automatic effect of parody, especially in a text that so openly pastiches Flaubert. Yet even the humour of the *Encyclopédie* is, in a sense, serious, insofar as it reinforces the quasi-political purpose of the enterprise—which is close to that of Flaubert's own *Dictionnaire*. Flaubert's hope had been that 'une fois qu'on l'aurait lu on n'osât plus parler, de peur de dire naturellement une des phrases qui s'y trouvent'.[3] Similarly, the note of humour in Bourdieu and Boltanski's project encourages us to resist repeating the ready-made phrases of the dominant ideology, for fear of sounding trite and ridiculous.

According to Bourdieu and Boltanski's analysis, the dominant ideology is structured by a fundamental opposition between the old and the new, or the past and the future, the traditional and the modern, and so on. Each of the other components of the ideology fits into one or other of these categories, forming a series of opposed pairs such as

3 'Once one had read it, one would not dare speak, for fear of naturally saying one of the phrases it contains' (trans. J.S.). Gustave Flaubert, 'Lettre à Louise Colet, 17 décembre 1852', in *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert : Correspondance*, troisième série, 1852–1854 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1927), p. 67.

closed/open, blocked/unblocked, small/large, enclosed/open, and local/universal. As a rule, the first term is never evoked positively. This schema can be applied in any circumstances and to any object: the small village and the large town, the grocery shop and the drugstore, the pre-war and the post-war, France and America. The sequences of nouns and adjectives produced in this way can then be strung together and elaborated into an apparently improvised flow of discourse:

> Chacune des oppositions fondamentales évoque, plus ou moins directement, toutes les autres. C'est ainsi par exemple que de l'opposition entre le « passé » et l'« avenir » on peut passer à l'opposition entre le « petit » et le « grand », au double sens de « planétaire » et de « complexe », ou encore à l'opposition entre le « local », c'est-à-dire le « provincial » ou le « national » (et le nationaliste), et le cosmopolite qui, prise sous un autre rapport, s'identifie à l'opposition entre l'« immobile » et le « mobile » (*ID*, 57).[4]

What Bourdieu and Boltanski present in *La production de l'idéologie dominante* is an ideal model, which, as they acknowledge, may appear 'trop beau pour être vrai' (*ID*, 17). An individual habitus may preserve attachments that sit uneasily with the dominant schema—for instance, a romanticised investment in village life—and the dominant ideology may be internalised unevenly or incompletely, producing tensions and contradictions within the system. Nevertheless, they argue that the extreme homogeneity of the French dominant class, both in social background and in educational formation, tended to minimise such discrepancies and discord.

*La production de l'idéologie dominante* thus offers not only an analysis of the generative principles of dominant discourse, but also an early demonstration of the critical procedures needed to resist it. Its Flaubertian parody is more than a satirical flourish: it is a practical exercise in symbolic resistance, designed to interrupt the automatisms of dominant speech and restore a measure of critical distance from

4 'Each of the fundamental oppositions evokes, more or less directly, all the others. Thus, for example, from the opposition between "past" and "future" one can pass to the opposition between "small" and "large", in the double sense of "planetary" and "complex", or else to the opposition between the "local"—that is, the "provincial" or the "national" (and the nationalist)—and the "cosmopolitan", which, from another angle, is identified with the opposition between the "immobile" and the "mobile"' (trans. J.S.).

its self-evidence. In this respect, the text anticipates a critical strategy that would recur in Bourdieu's later political interventions: the effort to make dominant discourse strange again by revealing its hidden presuppositions, rhetorical operations, and the interests it serves. It is a strategy to which Bourdieu would return, some twenty years later, with particular force in 'La Pensée Tietmeyer'. This time, however, he was no longer confronting only the commonplaces of the French political and administrative class, but the authorised language of a global economic elite, whose apparently technical or neutral formulations universalised the interests of dominant groups.

## 'La Pensée Tietmeyer'

In 1996, Bourdieu gave a lecture at the University of Freiburg in which he again drew on the literary tradition to analyse the functioning of neoliberal discourse, by then massively dominant. The intervention was first published shortly afterwards in *Libération* as 'Contre la "pensée Tietmeyer", un Welfare state européen',[5] and later reworked as 'La Pensée Tietmeyer' in *Contre-feux*. Its immediate occasion was an interview published in *Le Monde* on 17 October 1996 with Hans Tietmeyer, then president of the Deutsche Bundesbank, which Bourdieu had reportedly read only the previous night.[6] Speaking in Freiburg, a university associated with traditions of hermeneutic and literary interpretation, Bourdieu turned this recent newspaper interview into an object of critical exegesis, borrowing the tools of textual analysis to expose the euphemisms, presuppositions, and rhetorical automatisms of neoliberal economic language. The analysis is worth quoting at some length because it shows the critical procedure in action. Bourdieu does not simply denounce Tietmeyer's position from outside; he reads the interview phrase by phrase, translating its neutral vocabulary back into the social consequences and class interests it euphemises. The passage also gives a good sense of the tone of the intervention: at once analytical, polemical, and dryly comic:

5 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Contre la « pensée Tietmeyer », un Welfare state européen', *Libération*, 25 October 1996.

6 Lucas Delattre, 'Le président de la Bundesbank parie sur l'euro en 1999', *Le Monde*, 17 October 1996.

Voici ce que dit le « grand prêtre du deutsche mark » : « L'enjeu aujourd'hui, c'est de créer les conditions favorables à une croissance durable, et la confiance des investisseurs. Il faut donc contrôler les budgets publics. »

C'est-à-dire — il sera plus explicite dans les phrases suivantes — enterrer le plus vite possible l'État social, et entre autres choses, ses politiques sociales et culturelles dispendieuses, pour rassurer les investisseurs qui aimeraient mieux se charger eux-mêmes de leurs investissements culturels.

[...]

Je continue ma lecture : « réformer le système de protection sociale ».

C'est-à-dire enterrer le welfare state et ses politiques de protection sociale, bien faites pour ruiner la confiance des investisseurs [...].

« Démanteler les rigidités sur les marchés du travail, de sorte qu'une nouvelle phase de croissance ne sera atteinte à nouveau que si nous faisons un effort de flexibilité sur le marché du travail ».

Splendide travail rhétorique, qui peut se traduire : Courage, travailleurs ! Tous ensemble faisons l'effort de flexibilité qui vous est demandé !

[...]

Les travailleurs, s'ils lisaient un journal aussi indiscutablement sérieux que *Le Monde*, entendraient immédiatement ce qu'il faut entendre : travail de nuit, travail pendant les week-ends, horaires irréguliers, pression accrue, stress, etc.

On voit que « sur-le-marché-du-travail » fonctionne comme une sorte d'épithète homérique susceptible d'être accrochée à un certain nombre de mots, et l'on pourrait être tenté, pour mesurer la flexibilité du langage de M. Hans Tietmeyer, de parler par exemple de flexibilité ou de rigidité sur les marchés financiers. L'étrangeté de cet usage dans la langue de bois de M. Hans Tietmeyer permet de supposer qu'il ne saurait être question, dans son esprit, de « démanteler les rigidités sur les marchés financiers », ou de « faire un effort de flexibilité sur les marchés financiers ». Ce qui autorise à penser que, contrairement à ce que peut laisser croire le « nous » du « si nous faisons un effort » de M. Hans Tietmeyer, c'est aux travailleurs et à eux seuls qu'est demandé cet effort de flexibilité (*CF1*, 51–54).[7]

7 'Here is what the "high priest of the Deutsche Mark" says: "What is at stake today is creating the conditions favourable to sustainable growth and investor confidence. Public budgets must therefore be controlled."

What Bourdieu is practising here is a form of symptomatic, or suspicious, reading: a mode of hermeneutical analysis concerned less with recovering the text's avowed meaning than with reconstructing the presuppositions, silences, euphemisms, and encoded interests that organise it. He reads Tietmeyer's formulations not simply for what they say, but for what they presuppose, displace, and render unsayable, translating the neutral language of economic expertise back into the social relations and antagonisms it helps to mask. In this sense, Bourdieu adopts some of the procedures of close reading associated with literary interpretation, but redirects them towards ideological critique.

This discourse, like the dominant ideology in France analysed twenty years earlier, also had its institutions, relays, producers, and channels of diffusion. For Bourdieu, the first line of defence against neoliberal discourse was therefore to reconstruct the history of its production and dissemination: to ask where it came from, who carried it, and how it acquired the force of common sense across Europe and beyond. In 'Le mythe de la "mondialisation" et l'État social européen', an intervention

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That is to say—he will be more explicit in the following sentences—burying the welfare state as quickly as possible, along with, among other things, its costly social and cultural policies, in order to reassure investors, who would prefer to take charge of their cultural investments themselves.

[...]

I continue my reading: "reform the system of social protection".

That is to say, bury the welfare state and its social protection policies, well designed to undermine investor confidence [...].

"Dismantle rigidities in labour markets, so that a new phase of growth will once again be achieved only if we make an effort towards flexibility in the labour market."

Splendid rhetorical work, which can be translated as follows: Courage, workers! Let us all make the effort towards flexibility that is being demanded of you!

[...]

Workers, if they read a newspaper as indisputably serious as *Le Monde*, would immediately hear what is meant: night work, weekend work, irregular hours, increased pressure, stress, etc.

We can see that "in the labour market" functions like a kind of Homeric epithet, capable of attaching itself to a certain number of words; and one might be tempted, in order to measure the flexibility of Mr Hans Tietmeyer's language, to speak, for example, of flexibility or rigidity in the financial markets. The strangeness of this usage in Mr Hans Tietmeyer's bureaucratic jargon allows one to suppose that, in his mind, there could be no question of "dismantling rigidities in the financial markets", or of "making an effort towards flexibility in the financial markets". This gives us grounds to think that, contrary to what the "we" in Mr Hans Tietmeyer's "if we make an effort" might lead one to believe, it is workers, and workers alone, from whom this effort towards flexibility is demanded' (trans. J.S.).

delivered to the Greek General Confederation of Labour in Athens in October 1996 and later included in *Contre-feux*, he points to research already being carried out in Britain, the United States, and France on the history and circulation of neoliberal discourse. What began as a trickle in the 1930s, formulated in think tanks and subsequently disseminated in journals such as *Preuves* and *Der Monat*—both associated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an anti-communist international network of intellectuals founded in 1950 and secretly funded by the CIA until this connection was exposed in 1967—had, by the 1990s, become a pervasive neoliberal *doxa*. It saturated the airwaves and flowed from the mouths of politicians, journalists, organic intellectuals—think-tank experts, economists, policy commentators and media intellectuals—and ordinary citizens alike, until, by a process of immersion, it could be understood and reproduced more or less fluently almost everywhere, without hesitation or forethought. One of the services the academic community could provide to the public, Bourdieu suggests, would be to circulate knowledge of this history widely, and in accessible formats, so that people might see where the ideas they take for granted come from, and whose interests those ideas express (*CF1*, 34–35).[8]

Another instrument of defence, however—and one whose public purpose has increasingly been obscured—is the ability to read texts closely, in order to understand how they affect us at an aesthetic, affective, and cognitive level. In Tietmeyer's text, and others like it, this means attending to the evocative connotations of terms such as "openness", "flexibility", "adaptability", and "mobility", which make liberalism sound like the road to universal emancipation (*I*, 351). Many of the sharpest tools for this sort of analysis are to be found in literary criticism, honed through the study of some of the most powerful and suggestive texts ever written. By standing back from language and examining our immediate responses to it, we become better able to recognise how words guide our perceptions, solicit our sympathies, and shape our judgements. This distance is not only analytical; it can

8 Bourdieu refers readers to Pierre Grémion, *Preuves: une revue européenne à Paris* (Paris: Julliard, 1989); Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l'anti-communisme : le congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris 1950–1975* (Paris: Fayard, 1995); and Keith Dixon, 'Les évangélistes du marché', *Liber*, 32 (1997), 5–6. Dixon later expanded this article into the book *Les Évangélistes du marché* (Paris: Raisons d'agir éditions, 1998).

also be ironic. Once the spell of self-evidence is broken, the phrases of dominant discourse can begin to sound less like neutral descriptions of reality than like rhetorical performances, with their own automatisms, evasions, and absurdities.

In a manner reminiscent of *La production de l'idéologie dominante*, a humorous effect is also produced by treating Hans Tietmeyer's text as though it were a passage inviting literary commentary: the gesture appears momentarily to elevate its status, while simultaneously puncturing its rhetorical authority. This quasi-literary framing also has a defamiliarising effect, drawing attention to the text's form and structure, as if we were approaching a literary work, whereas a distracted or uncritical reading might otherwise simply carry readers along with Tietmeyer's train of thought. At the same time, the procedure is also a form of symbolic aggression, insofar as it forcibly redescribes Tietmeyer's language in terms the text itself seeks to exclude. The very intensity of this operation—at once comic, defamiliarising, and polemical—means that it may also backfire if readers experience the redescription less as a revelation than as an interpretive imposition.

Moreover, if Bourdieu is right to insist that dominant discourses work partly through their formal properties—their euphemisms, rhythms, oppositions, and apparently natural metaphors—his reading of Tietmeyer also risks implying that these texts owe their efficacy chiefly to mystification, as though their readers were simply duped by rhetoric. But neoliberal discourse could not have become so pervasive had it not also articulated real experiences and aspirations: desires for security, prosperity, efficiency, modernisation, and release from bureaucratic inertia. Terms such as "flexibility", "mobility", or "openness" succeeded not only because they concealed domination; they also drew force from the fact that they resonated with genuine hopes and frustrations. To acknowledge this is not to abandon critique, but to specify its limits. If dominant language exercises power not only by masking interests but also by organising diffuse desires into a coherent vision of the future, then resistance cannot consist in demystification alone. It must also contest the forms in which that future is made imaginable: the images, narratives, calculations, and affects through which certain possibilities come to appear desirable, inevitable, or reasonable.

## A politics of form

Since ideology played, in Bourdieu's view, such an important part in maintaining the existing relations of domination, he saw a corresponding role for critical intellectuals—including writers and artists—in counteracting its effects. Academics and researchers could, first of all, confront the dominant ideology on the terrain of theory itself: 'À cette idéologie, qui habille de raison pure une pensée simplement conservatrice', he argued, 'il est important d'opposer des raisons, des arguments, des réfutations, des démonstrations, et donc de faire du travail scientifique' (*CF1*, 60).[9] Particularly important to Bourdieu was the idea of an *économie du bonheur* ('economics of happiness'): a form of counter-calculation that would turn economic arguments back against policymakers by counting the social costs, as well as the financial costs, of supposedly economic decisions:

> même si cela peut paraître cynique, il faut retourner contre l'économie dominante ses propres armes, et rappeler que, dans la logique de l'intérêt bien compris, la politique strictement économique n'est pas nécessairement économique — en insécurité des personnes et des biens, donc en police, etc. [...] Qu'est-ce que cela coûtera à long terme en débauchages, en souffrances, en maladies, en suicides, en alcoolisme, en consommation de drogue, en violence dans la famille, etc., autant de choses qui coûtent très cher, en argent, mais aussi en souffrance ? (*CF1*, 45)[10]

Neoliberalism also had its organic intellectuals—figures such as Anthony Giddens, theorist of the "third way" associated with Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, against whom Bourdieu took a personal stand (*I*, 449, 471)—and it was important for those with the requisite expertise to meet them on their own ground.

It was not only by offering rational arguments, though, that

9 'Against this ideology, which dresses a simply conservative system of thought in the garb of pure reason, it is important to oppose reasons, arguments, refutations, demonstrations, and therefore to do scientific work' (trans. J.S.).

10 'even if this may seem cynical, we must turn the dominant economic orthodoxy's own weapons against it, and point out that, according to the logic of enlightened self-interest, policies that are strictly economic are not necessarily economical—in terms of insecurity affecting persons and property, and therefore policing, etc. [...] What will this cost in the long term in redundancies, suffering, illness, suicides, alcoholism, drug use, domestic violence, and so on—all things that are extremely costly, not only in money but also in human suffering?' (trans. J.S.).

intellectuals could help in the struggle against neoliberalism. As has often been observed, modern capitalism functions in large part by manufacturing desires, through advertising, films, bestsellers, and so on, which celebrate and inculcate the materialistic, militaristic, and moral values of the dominant. It was therefore also important to fight back with counter-discourses capable of operating at an aesthetic and affective level. Bourdieu suggests a particular role in this project for writers: experts in the creation of alternative and future worlds, they could give 'forme visible et sensible aux conséquences prévisibles mais non encore visibles de la politique néolibérale' (*I*, 475).[11] Whereas the dominant ideology tends to narrow the range of possible futures—for instance, by presenting global free-market capitalism as, if not the best of all possible worlds, then at least the only reasonable and rational path—writers could help reopen the struggle over the sense of the social world: over its direction and meaning, its history and its future. This is a properly symbolic struggle, but not for that reason a merely symbolic one. As Bourdieu writes, 'la croyance que tel ou tel avenir, désiré ou redouté, est possible, probable ou inévitable, peut, dans certaines conjonctures, mobiliser autour d'elle tout un groupe, et contribuer ainsi à favoriser ou à empêcher l'avènement de cet avenir' (*MP*, 277–78).[12] Literature can contribute to this mobilising effect by altering the field of the imaginable: by making certain futures visible, sensible, desirable, or intolerable. We can find many precedents for this sort of work in the literary tradition: from Zola's *Germinal*, which gives visible and affective form to the exploitation, violence, hunger, and collective misery produced by industrial capitalism, to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which extrapolated contemporary tendencies of bureaucratic, militarised, and linguistic domination into an imaginable political nightmare and has since entered popular consciousness as a permanent point of reference—and warning—in today's world of surveillance cameras, wars waged in the name of peace and freedom, political jargon that narrows the range of thought, and increasingly

11 'give visible and sensible form to consequences of neoliberal policy that are predictable but not yet visible' (*Political Interventions*, 387).

12 'the belief that this or that future, either desired or feared, is possible, probable or inevitable can, in some historical conditions, mobilize a group around it and so help to favour or prevent the coming of that future' (*Meditations,* 235).

automated forms of cultural production.

Another of the ways writers could contribute to the political struggle was by using comedy, parody, satire, and pastiche to unsettle our usual confidence in figures of authority. A particular group Bourdieu singled out for such action was journalists, and especially those whom he termed *intellectuels médiatiques* ('media intellectuals'): figures who used their control over the means of cultural production and consecration—above all television—to exert considerable influence over French political and cultural life. 'Ces nouveaux maîtres à penser sans pensée', Bourdieu writes, 'monopolisent le débat public au détriment des professionnels de la politique (parlementaires, syndicalistes, etc.); et aussi des intellectuels', whose traditional function they had replaced (*RA*, 556).[13] Yet lacking both the specialist competence and the critical acumen needed to resist the powerful and their authorised discourse, even their challenges could serve to ratify the existing order, making it appear as though it had withstood scrutiny and debate (*LE*, 58–59). Bourdieu imagined, for instance,

> une émission critique qui associerait des chercheurs avec des artistes, des chansonniers, des satiristes, pour soumettre à l'épreuve de la satire et du rire ceux qui, parmi les journalistes, les hommes politiques, et les « intellectuels » médiatiques, tombent de manière trop flagrante dans l'abus de pouvoir symbolique (*I*, 394).[14]

This kind of symbolic action also has obvious antecedents, which in France extend from the satirical print culture of the French Revolution and Honoré Daumier in the 1830s, through *Le Canard enchaîné*, founded in 1915, to the latex puppets of *Les Guignols de l'info* on Canal+.

Bourdieu's main historical reference point for this kind of intervention, however, was literary: the Austrian writer, journalist, playwright, and poet Karl Kraus (1874–1936), whose journal *Die Fackel* showed how the resources of satire, parody, and dramatic staging could be turned

13 'These new masters of thoughtless thought monopolize public debate to the detriment of professionals of politics (parliamentary legislators, trade union leaders, etc.), and also to the detriment of intellectuals' (*Rules*, 346).

14 'a critical programme bringing together scholars and artists, singers and satirists, with the aim of putting to the test of satire and laughter those journalists, politicians, and media "intellectuals" who fall in too glaring fashion into abuse of symbolic power' (*Political Interventions*, 323).

into instruments of symbolic counterattack (*LE*, 11). Founded in 1899 and, from 1911 onwards, written almost entirely by Kraus himself, *Die Fackel* became a sustained assault on the Austrian press and on the corruption of public language. Kraus's preferred method was not simply denunciation from outside, but quotation, juxtaposition, and reversal: he reproduced headlines, formulae, and fragments of journalistic prose in ways that made their clichés, distortions, and verbal violence newly visible. The critical force of this procedure lay in making dominant discourse expose itself: rather than denouncing journalistic language from outside, Kraus reproduced and rearranged it so that its evasions, automatisms, and contradictions became visible from within. In this sense, Kraus offered Bourdieu a model of political intervention in which form itself—montage, quotation, mimicry, displacement—became a mode of critique.

Yet if literary and artistic form can unsettle symbolic authority, it does not follow that it can, by itself, transform the social conditions that sustain that authority. Bourdieu himself was wary of the belief, widespread in some circles in the 1960s, that literature is intrinsically subversive. Most symbolic revolutions, he notes, remain purely symbolic, leaving social mechanisms and power structures intact (*CD*, 177; *MP*, 156). This was all the more true in a cultural field increasingly dominated by powerful media institutions, commercial publishers, television networks, and journalistic intermediaries capable of amplifying some voices while rendering others inaudible. The problem was not only that individual writers and artists lacked political efficacy in any immediate sense, but that they were confronting organised and well-capitalised systems of symbolic production. Their interventions could disturb, expose, or ridicule dominant discourse; but without institutions, networks, and counter-powers of their own, such interventions risked remaining isolated gestures within a communicational space largely controlled by others. It is in this sense that the politics of form leads into Bourdieu's project for an *intellectuel collectif* ('collective intellectual'): a way of organising dispersed cultural and scientific competences into a counter-power capable of confronting the vast institutional machinery of journalism, television, publishing, and the market on more equal terms.

## For a collective intellectual

In May 1989, Bourdieu presented a paper in Turin that marked the beginning of a more explicitly activist phase of his career. Published in English as 'The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World',[15] it later appeared in French as 'Pour un corporatisme de l'universel' in *Les Règles de l'art*. A further version was included in *Interventions* under the title 'Pour des luttes à l'échelle européenne. Réinventer un intellectuel collectif'. At the centre of Bourdieu's proposal was the creation of an interdisciplinary and international *intellectuel collectif* ('collective intellectual')—which Bourdieu conceived as 'un pouvoir international de critique et de surveillance, voire de proposition' (*RA*, 558). Its task would be to bring together diverse forms of competence—scientific, literary, artistic, legal, economic—and to transform them into a durable counter-power capable of intervening in public debate. At the very least, this collective intellectual would defend the social conditions that made independent cultural and scientific work possible. As we began to see in Chapter 3, and will examine more closely in Chapter 6, Bourdieu viewed these conditions as increasingly imperilled by the commercialisation of the book trade and publishing industry, by new forms of state patronage, and by the growing domination of journalism and television over cultural life, both in France and beyond (*RA*, 558).

Bourdieu had already created a number of institutions, networks, and collective initiatives through which intellectual work could be coordinated. After May 1968, he helped establish the Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture (CSEC), which reflected on the reform and democratisation of education and cultural institutions. In 1975, he founded *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the sociological journal around which his research group was organised. He also presided over the Association de réflexion sur les enseignements supérieurs et la recherche (ARESER), created in 1992 to provide academics with a collective voice in debates over the future of French higher education. In 1993, he became involved in the Comité international de soutien aux intellectuels algériens (CISIA), established to support Algerian

15 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World', *Telos*, 81 (1989), 99–110, https://doi.org/10.3817/0989081099

intellectuals who, following the outbreak of the civil war, had been subjected to violence, intimidation, and assassination (see *I*, 293–95). In the mid-1990s, Bourdieu also helped launch Raisons d'agir, the initiative that came closest to realising his broader call for a collective intellectual. Founded both as a publishing house and as an activist research collective, Raisons d'agir sought to make critical social science accessible beyond the university, above all through short, inexpensive books and public interventions addressed to a wider readership. It became closely associated with Bourdieu's political activity in the late 1990s, particularly his opposition to neoliberal reform and his support for social movements.

Bourdieu's attempts to create organisations on an international scale, however, met with less success. His most ambitious project was, as it happens, a fundamentally 'literary' project: *Liber*, a European book review, which was launched in October 1989.[16] The review made a strong start. It attracted a number of institutional sponsors and was carried as a free supplement in national newspapers in Britain, Spain, Italy, France, and Germany. The grand goals of *Liber* included uniting Europe's intellectuals around a shared project and working to overcome the linguistic barriers, delays in translation, and inertia of scholastic institutions, which impede communication between European cultures. It published reviews, essays, polemics, and dialogues on literature, politics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, religion, nationalism, and European intellectual life more broadly. Its pages ranged widely, from discussions of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Louis Marin to reflections on the fall of the Berlin Wall, the responsibilities of intellectuals, journalism, Tietmeyer, and the rise of neoliberalism. Yet it soon ran into difficulty. The review faltered after just the first few issues, as financial backers and host publications pulled out, and as the structure of its organisation disintegrated—leaving, in the end, only Bourdieu and one other person running the entire operation (*CP*, 79). Already by the seventh issue, *Liber* had retreated to the French language, and between the covers of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, although it retained its pan-European coverage. The review was quietly discontinued just

16 This discussion of *Liber* draws on Peter Collier's article, 'Liber: Liberty and Literature', *French Cultural Studies*, 4.12 (1993), 291–303, https://doi.org/10.1177/095715589300401210

before its tenth anniversary.

Another cautionary tale concerns the International Parliament of Writers, established in 1993 by writers and intellectuals including Bourdieu, Beryl Bainbridge, Toni Morrison, Jacques Derrida, Christopher Hitchens, and Salman Rushdie. In a manifesto statement, 'A Declaration of Independence' (1994), Rushdie describes the purpose of the Parliament as being to 'fight for oppressed writers and against all those who persecute them and their work, and to renew continually the declaration of independence without which writing is impossible; and not only writing but dreaming; and not only dreaming, but thought; and not only thought, but liberty itself'.[17] Key among its practical initiatives was the creation of a network of Cities of Asylum, which offered safe haven and support to writers fleeing censorship and persecution. While endorsing these aims and initiatives, Bourdieu proposed a far more ambitious programme, in a rejoinder to Rushdie's manifesto first published in *Libération*.[18] Bourdieu envisaged giving the International Parliament of Writers a more organised administrative structure, including secretariats, commissions, and regional meetings, from which to launch simultaneous press conferences, demonstrations, and petitions, and proposed expanding the Parliament's remit to include supporting publishing houses, magazines, and translators, which are also crucial contributors to the production and dissemination of literary texts. Clearly with his own vision for a collective intellectual in mind, Bourdieu also saw the Parliament working with other specialist groupings to produce 'livres blancs présentant les résultats du travail de "commissions de spécialistes" (accompagnées de contributions d'écrivains) et servant de base à des revendications ou des recommandations pratiques qui seront défendues collectivement dans la presse' (*I*, 292).[19] Bourdieu's proposals went unheeded, however, and he scaled back his involvement. Even in its more limited capacity, the International Parliament of Writers was

17 Salman Rushdie, 'A Declaration of Independence: For the International Parliament of Writers', *Liber*, 17 (1994), p. 29.

18 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Un parlement des écrivains pour quoi faire ?', *Libération,* 3 November 1994; reprinted in *I,* 289–92.

19 'the International Parliament of Writers should promote the publication of "white papers" presenting the results of the work of "commissions of specialists" (accompanied by contributions from writers) and serving as a basis for demands or practical recommendations that are collectively defended in the press' (*Political Interventions*, 240).

always a fragile and fractious grouping. It too was dissolved after a decade, without much comment.

Perhaps the idea of creating organisations and bureaucratic structures was never likely to appeal to writers. One of the distinctive characteristics of the literary field, as we saw in Chapter 2, is its low degree of institutionalisation (*RA*, 379 n. 21), and this is doubtless one of the properties of the field that attract agents whose dispositions incline them towards autonomy, informality, and resistance to bureaucratic control. Expecting such agents voluntarily to impose these constraints on themselves is therefore to ask them to act against some of the dispositions that drew them to the literary field in the first place. It may also be, as Bourdieu suggested in a 1989 interview with his long-term collaborator Loïc Wacquant, that Europe's intellectuals were 'not yet ready' for the sort of collaboration and joint commitment he was trying to encourage—which was without precedent in any national tradition, and ruled out a certain number of pre-established roles.[20]

The notion of a collective intellectual was first of all intended to overcome the opposition, particularly strong in English-speaking countries (which do not have the tradition of Voltaire, Zola, and Sartre), between scholarship and politics, or between intellectual detachment and commitment. But it was also constructed against the Sartrean model of engagement on every possible issue, which exposed intellectuals to the risk of overstepping the bounds of their competence. As Wacquant suggests elsewhere, it may perhaps be understood best as a sort of synthesis of Sartre's 'total intellectual' and Foucault's 'specific intellectual' who limits their political activity to a particular area of expertise (*IRS*, 190). Bourdieu wanted to 'rassembler des "intellectuels spécifiques" au sens de Foucault, dans un "intellectuel collectif", interdisciplinaire et international' (*I*, 474–75),[21] able like Sartre's 'total intellectual' to roam across a broad range of issues and to produce a wide variety of forms of intervention, by drawing on the specialist skills and expertise of its members. Yet this very hybridity made the project

20 Loïc Wacquant and Pierre Bourdieu, 'From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on *La Noblesse d'État*', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10.3 (1993), 19–44 (p. 38), https://doi.org/10.1177/026327693010003002

21 'bring together those whom Foucault referred to as "specific intellectuals" into a "collective intellectual", interdisciplinary and international' (*Political Interventions*, 387).

difficult to conceive, let alone realise. There was no clear precedent, in either the Sartrean tradition of the solitary engaged intellectual or the Foucauldian model of localised expertise, for this kind of collective, interdisciplinary, and international agency. Bourdieu was therefore asking intellectuals not simply to organise, but to invent a form of action for which their inherited roles had left them poorly prepared.

There are also more material reasons why Bourdieu's vision of an international collective intellectual appears unrealistic. As the *Liber* project proved, any such organisation requires a steady source of funding and sustained commitment. Yet it is difficult to see why sponsors would be inclined to fund an organisation dedicated to criticising the political, economic, and media powers from which sponsorship would most likely have to come. In his plans for the International Parliament of Writers, Bourdieu seems to suggest it could run on sheer generosity. The Parliament should be 'capable de demander et d'obtenir un dévouement militant, c'est-à-dire des contributions (cotisation, don de temps et de travail) sans contrepartie (anonymat, travail collectif)' (*I*, 290).[22] Bourdieu's own sociology, however, suggests this is a near-impossible request: that reserves of goodwill will soon run dry if individuals do not receive anything in return for their "gifts".

Yet, if there were no ready-made precedents for the *intellectuel collectif*, there was at least a historical precedent for the creation of a new intellectual role. This was the emergence of the modern intellectual, particularly as embodied by Zola, which Bourdieu analysed in *Les Règles.* Zola did not simply occupy an already available role; he helped make visible a new one, by converting the autonomy of the literary field into a form of public authority and helping to crystallise the modern figure of the public intellectual. 'In a homologous fashion', Jeremy Ahearne writes, 'Bourdieu could be seen as seeking to help into being a new position in the cultural policy field that could alter the play of forces within that field'.[23] Just as Zola drew on the accumulated autonomy of the literary field in order to intervene politically without speaking as

22 'a movement able to demand and obtain an activist commitment, i.e., contributions (subscriptions, gifts of time and work) that are unrewarded (hence anonymity, collective work)' (*Political Interventions,* 239).

23 Jeremy Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The Cultural Policy Thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Régis Debray* (Coventry: Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, 2004), p. 68.

a politician, Bourdieu sought to draw on the accumulated autonomy and expertise of several fields—sociology, literature, art, law, economics, philosophy—in order to create a new collective authority capable of intervening in public life. As Ahearne goes on to observe, 'the odds, clearly, would always be against such a potentially nebulous pole, liable always to rescatter, and whose only substantial capital is cultural and symbolic'.[24] And in fact, Bourdieu's most ambitious plans for an international collective intellectual failed. Yet he did create smaller and more durable platforms for collective intellectual work—above all *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* and Raisons d'agir, both of which outlived him and remain active institutions.

*

This chapter has examined the modes of action through which Bourdieu imagined writers, artists, and intellectuals intervening in political life: the critique of dominant discourse, the defamiliarisation of official language, and the use of narrative to reopen the space of possible futures. It has also considered his attempts to organise writers and other cultural producers collectively, as a way of amplifying the otherwise limited force of isolated interventions. These reflections point to a conception of literary writing as a specific form of symbolic practice, through which writers and other cultural producers can intervene in struggles over the classification and perception of the social world. At the same time, however, they reveal the limits of such interventions: literary strategies can unsettle the language of power, but cannot by themselves transform the systems through which power relations are maintained and reproduced. Bourdieu's most ambitious attempts to organise writers into durable collective structures offer something like experimental proof of this difficulty, repeatedly encountering both material constraints and resistance grounded in the dispositions of the literary field itself. The next chapter therefore shifts the question from what writers, artists, and intellectuals might do politically to Bourdieu's cultural policy thinking: above all, his proposals for the future of education and for the role of the state in supporting literature and the arts.

24 Ibid.

# 6. Literature and Cultural Policy

Pierre Bourdieu was generally wary of prescriptive programmes, especially in his scientific work. Even in his political interventions, he warns against 'le piège du programme', arguing that 'il y a bien assez de partis et d'appareils pour ça' (*CF1*, 62).[1] In his view, researchers should restrict themselves to what they are best placed to do: provide information and analysis rather than programmes or prescriptions. Yet Bourdieu did, on several prominent occasions, intervene directly in cultural policy debates. This chapter reconstructs the tension between these two commitments: first, by asking what value he could still assign to literary culture after his critiques of education, distinction, and legitimate taste; then, by examining how his critical analyses of the education system informed his proposals for educational reform; and finally, by considering how his concept of autonomy shaped his arguments for the public protection of non-commercial literary culture beyond the school.

## Reproduction and distinction

Literature first appears in Bourdieu's sociological critiques of contemporary French society through the works that did most to establish his early reputation: his studies of education, cultural consumption, and taste. These works were also decisive in shaping the reception of Bourdieu's work on literature, especially the suspicion that his critique of legitimate culture amounted to a hostility towards literature itself, or to a reduction of literary value to social distinction and misrecognition. This section begins, therefore, by re-examining his critique of the role literary

1 'the trap of programmes' and 'there are quite enough parties and apparatuses for that' (trans. J.S.).

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culture played in the French school system—where apparently neutral standards of linguistic ease, taste, and literary competence are described as helping to disguise inherited cultural privilege as academic merit. It then turns to *L'Amour de l'art* and *La Distinction*, where the legitimate relation to literature and high culture more generally appears as part of a wider economy of distinction, shaping patterns of cultural participation, exclusion, and self-exclusion beyond the school. The question, then, is whether this critique leaves any room for a positive account of literary value: one that could justify state subsidy and protection, or literature's place in a progressive education system.

At the time of *Les Héritiers* and *La Reproduction*, published in 1964 and 1970 respectively, literary values still occupied a dominant position in the French education system. In *La Reproduction*, Bourdieu and Passeron describe 'la valeur éminente que le système français accorde à l'aptitude littéraire, et, plus précisément, à l'aptitude à transformer en discours littéraire toute expérience, à commencer par l'expérience littéraire, bref ce qui définit la manière française de vivre la vie littéraire — et parfois même scientifique — comme une vie parisienne' (*R*, 143–44).[2] In *Les Héritiers*, this valorisation of literary flair is shown to favour students from privileged, especially Parisian, backgrounds. Such students were already familiar with the bookish language of the classroom, because it was close to the language used at home. Even without direct parental pressure to read, they acquired habits and dispositions that either directly served their schoolwork—linguistic competence, the capacity for quiet study and independent learning—or were indirectly rewarded by the school, such as good taste, proper diction, linguistic fluency and confidence, or simply a respectful disposition towards teachers and the educational institution (*H*, 30–33). Their parents were also more likely to take them to theatres, museums, and concerts—forms of contact provided by the school only sporadically, if at all—thereby giving them the background cultural knowledge and experience tacitly demanded by literary studies. According to *Les Héritiers*, nowhere was the influence of social origin more visible than in success in literature classes, making

2 'the pre-eminent value that the French system accords to literary aptitude, and, more precisely, to the aptitude to transform any experience into literary discourse, beginning with literary experience; in short, what defines the French way of living literary—and sometimes even scientific—life as a Parisian life' (trans. J.S.).

literary studies 'le terrain par excellence pour étudier l'action des facteurs culturels de l'inégalité devant l'École' (*H*, 19).[3]

If the mechanisms by which the French school and university system contributed to social reproduction so often went unnoticed, it was because the social differences it ratified were translated into academic classifications: marks, rankings, comments, percentages. These classifications made inherited privilege appear as measurable merit. A good example is a document Bourdieu discovered during his research into the *grandes écoles*, in which a professor had recorded his students' marks, comments on their performance, and their social origins. By plotting these data on a simple graph, Bourdieu was able to establish a correlation between academic success and social class. 'Autrement dit', he explains in a 1975 interview with Antoine Casanova and Michel Simon, 'le système de classement euphémistique a pour fonction d'établir la connexion entre la classe et la note, mais en la niant ou, mieux, en la déniant — comme dit la psychanalyse' (*I*, 94).[4] This mechanism recalls Bourdieu's account of literary denegation: like literary denegation, euphemistic classification transfigures social reality into a more acceptable form, allowing it to operate precisely because it is not recognised for what it is.

Bourdieu considered the resulting *effet de verdict* ('verdict effect') to be one of the most important and, for many, most damaging operations performed by the school. In an interview with Jean-Pierre Salgas, he gives this point greater force by drawing an analogy with Kafka's *The Trial*, which he reads as a metaphor for the education system. Like Josef K., who is condemned by a tribunal he is forced to recognise but whose judgement he can neither challenge nor fully understand, children internalise the verdicts of their teachers—reinforced by their families and society at large—until these verdicts become part of how they see themselves. 'C'est un univers dans lequel on entre pour savoir qui on est,' Bourdieu explains, 'et avec une attente d'autant plus anxieuse qu'on y est moins attendu. Il vous dira, de façon insidieuse ou brutale: "tu n'es qu'un…" — suivi

3 'the ideal terrain for studying the action of cultural factors in inequality in relation to schooling' (trans. J.S.).

4 'In other words, the system of euphemistic classification has the function of establishing a connection between class and marks, but precisely by denying such a connection—by denegating it, in the psychoanalytic sense' (*Political Interventions*, 67).

généralement d'une insulte qui, dans ce cas-là, est sanctionnée par une institution indiscutable, reconnue de tous' (*I*, 205).[5] Bourdieu describes the 'traumatismes de l'identité' provoked by the school system's verdicts as 'sans doute un des grands facteurs pathogènes de notre société' (*I*, 205).[6] These verdicts leave some children scarred by anxiety, insecurity, and low self-esteem, while others are confirmed and legitimated in their inherited way of being. We can pause to notice how Bourdieu turns here to literature as a means of making a sociological mechanism visible: Kafka allows him to render the violence of scholastic judgement palpable, and to place it at a defamiliarising distance.

At school, this misrecognition of inherited privilege as natural talent or merit was reinforced by a wider literary mythology of inspired genius. The idea of the artist as an exceptional creator, endowed with a mysterious gift, had its pedagogical counterpart in what Bourdieu (following Nietzsche) calls 'the dogma of the immaculate perception': the belief that the capacity to understand and appreciate works of art is itself a matter of natural aptitude (*D*, 381). In *La Distinction*, he links this dogma directly to the literary cult of the self:

> La littérature où, comme disait Gide dans son *Journal*, « rien ne vaut que ce qui est personnel » et la célébration dont elle fait l'objet dans le champ littéraire et dans les systèmes d'enseignement, sont évidemment au centre de ce culte du moi où la philosophie, souvent réduite à une affirmation hautaine de la distinction du penseur, chante aussi sa partie (*D*, 486).[7]

The point is not only that literary works were treated as the unique expressions of unique creators. It is also that students were expected to respond in kind: to produce personal opinions, interpretations, and tastes, while little was done to teach the cultural references, comparisons,

5 'It's a world that you enter in order to know what you are, and with all the more anxious expectation, the less you are expected there. It says to you, in an insidious or brutal fashion: "You are just a…"—generally followed by an insult that, in cases such as this, is sanctioned by an institution beyond discussion and recognized by all' (*Political Interventions,* 162).

6 'these traumas of identity are undoubtedly one of the main pathogenic factors in our society' (*Political Interventions,* 162).

7 'Literature, in which, as Gide said in his Journal, "only the personal has any value", and the celebration which surrounds it in the literary field and in the educational system, are clearly central to this cult of the self, in which philosophy, often reduced to a lofty assertion of the thinker's distinction, also has a part to play' (*Distinction*, 52).

vocabulary, and conceptual tools needed to formulate such responses. What appeared as spontaneity was therefore often the disguised effect of prior acquisition.

Importantly, Bourdieu also saw this charismatic ideology of art at work in official French cultural policy in the 1960s. His early critique targeted two related assumptions: first, 'l'idéologie du don naturel et de l'œil neuf' (*AA*, 90–91),[8] according to which responsiveness to works of high culture was a matter of direct, unmediated perception; second, 'l'idéologie des "besoins culturels"' (*AA*, 156),[9] according to which all individuals possess an innate, if not always satisfied, need for legitimate culture. These assumptions underpinned, for instance, the ill-fated *Maisons de Culture*, the flagship project of André Malraux, then Minister of Culture. As the survey results in *L'Amour de l'art* show—and as Bourdieu's statistical model predicted—these institutions catered primarily to those who were already culturally engaged. They failed in their mission to bring high culture to the masses because they treated access as a merely physical problem, as if opening cultural institutions in a locality were enough to create the dispositions needed to use them: 'comme s'ils croyaient que la seule inaccessibilité physique des œuvres empêche la grande majorité de les aborder, de les contempler et de les savourer' (*AA*, 151).[10] The cost of this purely formal accessibility was that it could result in blaming the culturally dispossessed for failing to take up opportunities that were only apparently available to them. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that André Malraux was himself a literary author, of works including *La Voie royale* (1930) and *L'Espoir* (1937). His cultural policy was shaped by a charismatic conception of art, in which great works were imagined as capable of acting directly on individuals, once the obstacle of physical access had been removed.

The divisive effects of literary culture already encountered in the education system also extended into wider society. In *La Distinction*, Bourdieu describes the exclusion, alienation, and sometimes revolt experienced by members of the popular classes when confronted with

8 'the ideology of the natural gift and of the fresh eye' (*Love of Art*, 54).
9 'the ideology of "cultural needs"' (*Love of Art*, 106).
10 'as if they believed that only the physical inaccessibility of the works of art prevented the great majority from approaching, contemplating and enjoying them' (*Love of Art*, 103).

works of high culture. One of his examples is avant-garde theatre, whose formal conventions tend to frustrate ordinary expectations of entertainment, emotional identification, narrative clarity, and participation (*D*, 34). The difficulty is not simply that such works are inaccessible, but that the legitimate mode of reception they presuppose often requires distance from the very forms of involvement that popular audiences seek (*D*, 36).

This mismatch between legitimate culture and popular expectation was reinforced by the social judgements attached to different ways of speaking, dressing, reading, and responding to culture. Within the popular classes, any display of pretentiousness in matters of language, taste, dress, manners, or cultural habits was often discouraged, especially among men, for whom interests and dispositions perceived as "bourgeois" tended to be marked as effeminate, in opposition to the values of strength and virility (*D*, 443–44). Conversely, within literary culture more specifically, the legitimate relation to works was opposed not only to the supposed bad taste of the popular classes, but also to the *cuistrerie*, or pedantic pretension, of petit-bourgeois readers whose tastes had been acquired through schooling or later in life, and who therefore lacked the cultivated reader's effortless *sens littéraire* ('feel for literature') (*D*, 73). The insecurity of self-taught *doctes* showed itself in tense hypercorrection and in a lingering taste for less legitimate genres, such as comic books, fantasy, or science fiction. Bourdieu evokes, in this context, the trained ape in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Kreislerbuch*, as an image of acquired cultivation that remains too effortful to pass for inherited ease (*D*, 105 n. 109). Here again, a literary reference helps Bourdieu render a sociological relation visible: the awkwardness of acquired cultivation beside the ease of inherited culture.

Reading habits were also part of what differentiated the dominant class, according to the survey analysis in *La Distinction*. Teachers read the most overall, especially novels and books on philosophy, politics, and economics; but they read relatively few detective novels or adventure stories. Business owners, by contrast, read the least. When they did read, novels made up the lowest proportion of their reading—despite the novel being the most popular genre overall—although they read a comparatively higher proportion of adventure stories and detective fiction (*D*, 132). The point of these comparisons is to show how even

within the dominant class cultural preferences vary according to the balance between cultural and economic capital. Reading habits thus help distinguish fractions within the dominant class itself: teachers, richer in cultural capital, define themselves through practices that business owners, richer in economic capital, are less likely to share. These differences help structure the field of power as a system of oppositions between fractions richer in cultural capital and fractions richer in economic capital, each defined not only by what it possesses, but also by what it rejects, lacks, or disdains.

Understandably, Bourdieu's critique of the cultural game led some readers to ask whether he saw anything in legitimate culture beyond its exclusionary effects, or whether the value attributed to cultural works was, in his analysis, reducible to their social uses as instruments of distinction. Danièle Sallenave draws the latter conclusion when she writes, after citing a passage from *La Distinction*: 'Il est donc vain d'opérer une distinction entre les grands livres et les autres, entre les bons films et les nanars, entre un Cremonini et les *Poulbots* de la Butte'.[11] Although Bourdieu rejected such interpretations, they were not entirely without foundation. Jeremy Ahearne points to a tendency in Bourdieu to '"absolutise" (detach from what he also holds to be true) certain lines of argument',[12] noting, for instance, that his insistence on the historically arbitrary character of legitimate culture can appear to leave little reason for privileging one culture over another:

> With the repeated insistence throughout *La Reproduction* that legitimate culture simply 'is' arbitrary, it is easy to forget the note (afterthought?) in its preface that the notion of pure arbitrariness is a logical construction without empirical referent that is necessary for the construction of the argument (somewhat like Rousseau's 'state of nature') [...] It is worthwhile, at the very least, to meditate on the extent to which the rites of culture are purely 'negative' (i.e. segregational) and its pleasures 'vain'.[13]

11 'It is therefore vain to distinguish between great books and others, between good films and trash, between a Cremonini and the Poulbots of the Butte' (trans. J.S.). Danièle Sallenave cited in Bernard Lahire, 'Présentation : pour une sociologie à l'état vif', in *Le Travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu : dettes et critiques*, ed. by Bernard Lahire (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), pp. 5–20 (p. 12 n. 7).

12 Jeremy Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The Cultural Policy Thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Régis Debray* (Coventry: Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, 2004), p. 41.

13 Ibid., p. 50.

Salgas put almost this very question to Bourdieu, in an interview published in 1985.[14] Reading his early work, in particular *La Reproduction* and *La Distinction*, Salgas observes, one could be left with the impression that literary value is reducible to rarity and distinctiveness. Did Bourdieu then consider literary studies to have a place in a modern education system? What about Marcel Proust, whom Bourdieu clearly admired—should he be on the school curriculum? Bourdieu responds emphatically:

> On retombe sur l'effet de ratification. C'est un fait que les biens culturels sont soumis à des usages sociaux de distinction qui n'ont rien à voir avec leur valeur intrinsèque. Suis-je pour ou contre Proust ? La question n'a pas de sens. Comment ne pas souhaiter que l'on puisse produire à l'infini des gens capables de faire ce qu'a fait Proust ou, du moins, de lire ce qu'il a écrit ? Ceux qui m'attaquent sur ce point, ou qui prennent contre moi la « défense » de la philosophie sont des gens dont le point d'honneur intellectuel est plus lié à l'usage social des choses intellectuelles qu'à ces choses elles-mêmes (*I*, 209).[15]

Clearly, Bourdieu did see value in literature beyond its social uses as an instrument of distinction. But the 'valeur intrinsèque' he invokes here is not the sacred or fetishised value of literature that his early sociological work critiques. What Bourdieu develops instead, across his work, is a distinction between literature's social uses as an instrument of distinction and domination—its exchange value—and its possible use value. In the dimension of exchange value, literary competence functions as a scarce cultural good: a means of classification, a sign of legitimate taste, and a resource through which inherited privilege can be converted into academic and social advantage. In the dimension of use value, however, literary competence appears as a set of linguistic, stylistic, imaginative, and critical resources that can enlarge what readers are able to perceive, conceive, and express. Literary works are valuable, on this account,

14 Jean-Pierre Salgas, 'Le Rapport du Collège de France : Pierre Bourdieu s'explique', *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 445 (1985), 8–10, repr. in *Interventions 1961–2001: Science sociale et action politique* (Marseille: Agone, 2002), pp. 203–10.

15 'You get back here to the effect of ratification. It is a fact that cultural goods are subject to social uses of distinction that have nothing to do with their intrinsic value. Am I for or against Proust? The question makes no sense. How can one not want there to be countless people able to do what Proust did, or at least read what he wrote? Those who attack me on this point, or use against me the "defence" of philosophy, are people whose intellectual pride is more bound up with the social use of intellectual things than with these things themselves' (*Political Interventions,* 165).

not because they are sacred objects to be admired from a distance, but because they store up forms of language, thought, and experience that can be appropriated and put to use. This is why Bourdieu can criticise the social uses of literary culture without abandoning the project of teaching it: the problem is not literary competence as such, but the unequal distribution of the conditions needed to acquire it.

Yet here we encounter another tension. If access to literature depends on social conditions that are unequally distributed, then any attempt to democratise literary culture must pass through pedagogy. But pedagogy can only succeed if students are able to recognise some relation between what is being taught and their own capacities, experiences, and possible futures. The solution to this tension cannot be found in experimental pedagogies that claim to abolish authority by making education non-directive, natural, or non-repressive. As Bourdieu and Passeron point out, there is no pedagogical action without symbolic violence (*R*, 27). Indeed, the illusion of non-directive education tends to favour those who already possess the cultural resources that the school refuses to name or teach. Again, *Les Héritiers* singles out French literary education in this context. The authors suggest that the image of the free or autonomous learner owed much of its appeal to the fact that it 'venait combler les attentes les plus profondes et les plus inavouées des étudiants littéraires, parisiens et bourgeois' (*H*, 75).[16] By treating intellectual work as if it required little more than freedom, self-expression, and personal initiative, this model presupposed precisely the resources that such students were most likely already to possess: familiarity with academic language and expectations, and motivation for intellectual work (cf. *H*, 113).

When Bourdieu became involved in writing a report on the future of education commissioned by President François Mitterrand in the mid-1980s,[17] these tensions were already central to his understanding of the education system. By this time, however, the former *voie royale* ('royal road') through the *série littéraire* ('literary stream') to the École normale supérieure had been displaced by a route through *la section*

16 'fulfilled the deepest and most unacknowledged expectations of bourgeois Parisian literature students' (trans. J.S.).

17 *Propositions pour l'enseignement de l'avenir*, élaborées à la demande de Monsieur le Président de la République par les professeurs du Collège de France (Paris: Collège de France, 1985). Further references to this text will be abbreviated to *PPEA*, followed by the page number, and included in the text.

*C*—later *S*, the *série scientifique* ('science stream')—to one of the Parisian *grandes écoles d'ingénieurs* (elite engineering schools). Surprisingly, perhaps, given Bourdieu's vocal advocacy of scientific reason—and his caustic critique, in *Les Héritiers* and *La Reproduction*, of the role played by literary culture in legitimating educational privilege—the report did not celebrate this reversal of the old hierarchy. Instead, it treated the new scientific pre-eminence as another form of scholastic domination, insofar as mathematics and science had come to function as the privileged instruments of selection and consecration, leaving students with other competences to appear and feel inferior (*PPEA*, 17).

In what follows, we will see how the report converts Bourdieu's critique of scholastic hierarchy into a reform programme aimed not at replacing literary culture with scientific culture, but at pluralising the very forms of culture and competence that the school is able to recognise. Its main thrust is to combine scientific rationality with historical and cultural reflexivity, so that science, literature, art, technical skill, and practical intelligence would cease to function as mutually exclusive or hierarchically ordered forms of excellence. Returning to one of the central arguments of this book, the report thus complicates any simple charge of scientism. It does not subordinate literature, art, or practical knowledge to science; rather, it proposes an education based on the complementarity and interconnection of different forms of knowledge and competence.

## Proposals for the future of education

The Collège de France report, *Propositions pour l'enseignement de l'avenir* (1985), was organised around nine general principles for educational reform. These ranged from the integration of scientific reason with the plurality of cultures, the diversification of recognised forms of excellence, and the multiplication of chances within the school system, to the periodic revision of curricula, the unification of transmitted knowledge, lifelong and alternating education, the use of modern media, and the opening of the school to external cultural institutions and producers. Bourdieu frequently emphasised the fact that the report was a collective work, which expressed the consensus of some forty specialists across a range of fields—as this gave force and credibility to the proposals (*I*, 203).

Nevertheless, he does seem to have been its main author. The report is written in his characteristic style and was later included in *Interventions*, his collection of political writings. Moreover, as we will see in this section, the positive and practical proposals contained in the report are very much underpinned by Bourdieu's critical and theoretical work.

The first principle of the report, 'L'unité de la science et la pluralité des cultures' ('The Unity of Science and the Plurality of Cultures'), proposes balancing the universalising ambitions of scientific reason with the relativising insights of the human sciences. If science aims at transhistorical and generalisable truths, the human sciences—being 'attentives à la pluralité des modes de vie, des sagesses et des sensibilités culturelles' (*PPEA*, 13)[18]—would provide the necessary counterweight. The key here would be to teach students to recognise the historical contingency and specificity of different forms of knowledge, including scientific knowledge. Paradoxically, the only universal basis for culture (and therefore education) is this recognition that no culture has a purely universal basis:

> Le seul fondement universel que l'on puisse donner à une culture réside dans la reconnaissance de la part d'arbitraire qu'elle doit à son historicité : il s'agirait donc de mettre en évidence cet arbitraire et d'élaborer les instruments nécessaires (ceux que fournissent la philosophie, la philologie, l'ethnologie, l'histoire ou la sociologie) pour comprendre et accepter d'autres formes de culture ; de là, la nécessité de rappeler l'enracinement historique de toutes les œuvres culturelles, y compris les œuvres scientifiques (*PPEA*, 14).[19]

In light of Bourdieu's broader œuvre, we can imagine what this might look like in practice. As we have seen, Bourdieu's sociology provides a model for analysing cultural works, including literature, as historically situated products of specialised fields. Indeed, his general theory of fields provides a way of holding together the two demands announced in the

18 'attentive to the plurality of ways of life, forms of wisdom, and cultural sensibilities' (trans. J.S.).

19 'The only universal foundation that can be given to a culture lies in recognising the element of arbitrariness it owes to its historicity: the task would therefore be to bring this arbitrariness to light and to develop the necessary instruments (those provided by philosophy, philology, ethnology, history, or sociology) for understanding and accepting other forms of culture; hence the need to recall the historical rootedness of all cultural works, including scientific works' (trans. J.S.).

report's first principle, 'L'unité de la science et la pluralité des cultures': the scientific ambition to explain cultural production systematically, and the historical-comparative attention to the plurality of cultural forms.

The second principle, 'La diversification des formes d'excellence', stems in some ways from the first. From the plurality of cultures are derived diverse forms of excellence, none of which should be raised above or subordinated to the others.

> Pour des raisons inséparablement scientifiques et sociales, il faudrait combattre toutes les formes, même les plus subtiles, de hiérarchisation des pratiques et des savoirs — notamment celles qui s'établissent entre le 'pur' et 'l'appliqué', entre le 'théorique' et le 'pratique' ou le 'technique', et qui revêtent une force particulière dans la tradition scolaire française — en même temps qu'imposer la reconnaissance sociale d'une multiplicité de hiérarchies de compétence distinctes et irréductibles (*PPEA,* 17–18).[20]

To privilege the pure over the applied, or the theoretical over the practical and technical, is not simply to translate social distinctions into educational distinctions, making inherited forms of prestige appear as differences of intelligence. The very categories themselves are misleading. No science is truly pure: even the most abstract theoretical work depends on instruments, techniques, routines, measurements, inscriptions, calculations, and trained bodily or practical dispositions. Conversely, no applied or technical practice is merely mechanical: it involves judgement, anticipation, classification, problem-solving, and often a tacit grasp of principles that may not take the form of explicit theory. The opposition between the theoretical and the practical therefore disguises the practical conditions of theory and the intellectual content of practice. Here, we can hear echoes of *Le Métier de sociologue*, whose very title presents scientific work not as pure observation but as a craft.

To counteract the traditional privilege accorded to the "pure" and the "theoretical" in the French school system, the report gives an important place to practice and production. In all subjects, students should be

20 'For inseparably scientific and social reasons, it would be necessary to combat all forms, even the most subtle, of hierarchisation of practices and forms of knowledge—notably those established between the "pure" and the "applied", between the "theoretical" and the "practical" or the "technical", and which have particular force in the French school tradition—while at the same time imposing the social recognition of a multiplicity of distinct and irreducible hierarchies of competence' (trans. J.S.).

asked to make or do something, and to learn through that activity. In science, this might mean carrying out an experiment rather than simply being shown one and recording the result. In language classes, it might mean producing a play, a film, a speech, a review, or a report, rather than only writing essays. Artistic education is understood in the same way: not mainly as discussion about art, but as practice in a chosen form, such as music, painting, drawing, design, photography, or cinema (notably, making room for both fine arts and applied arts). The brief mention that artistic practice should be 'librement et volontairement choisie (au lieu d'être, comme aujourd'hui, indirectement imposée)' (*PPEA*, 19)[21] is important. If artistic education is imposed, however implicitly, in only one legitimate form, it risks reproducing the very hierarchy the report wants to weaken. Giving students choice, by contrast, allows them to invest their energies in an artistic practice in which they can recognise themselves, rather than experiencing artistic education as another externally imposed school requirement.

At first sight, Principle II might seem to be in tension with Principle VI, 'L'unification des savoirs transmis' ('The Unification of Transmitted Knowledge'). Principle II multiplies recognised competences, while Principle VI seeks to unify the knowledge transmitted by the school. In fact, Principle VI fits within the same logic as Principles I and II. From Principle I, it takes the idea that culture should be understood historically: all cultural works, including scientific works, should be grasped in relation to the conditions of their emergence and development. From Principle II, it takes the refusal of a single hierarchy of excellence: literature, science, art, philosophy, law, technology, and practical knowledge should not be ranked from higher to lower according to one dominant model of intellectual value. Its distinctive contribution is the idea that these various and specific forms of knowledge and practice can be complementary. Diversification should not mean leaving students with a set of separate competences, each enclosed within its own discipline. Principle VI responds by treating these forms of knowledge not as isolated domains but as historically connected practices.

Principle VI therefore emphasises the historical relations, borrowings, and crossovers between forms of knowledge. Its

21 'freely and voluntarily chosen (instead of being, as it is today, indirectly imposed)' (trans. J.S.).

example—the link between Renaissance painting and mathematical perspective—is revealing because it shows artistic and scientific developments as distinct but connected (*PPEA*, 33). Different cultural and scientific works should be understood as parts of broader historical configurations: developments in art, literature, science, philosophy, law, and technology often emerge simultaneously because they are shaped by shared problems, institutions, techniques, social transformations, and forms of perception; for this reason, they can also draw on, respond to, and provide models for one another. We can find another example in Bourdieu's discussion, in *Les Règles de l'art*, of the exchanges between writers and painters in the nineteenth-century field of cultural production. The painters offered writers the model of the pure artist, freed from academic and bourgeois demands; writers, in turn, supplied painters with the critical language and symbolic support needed to make this break intelligible and legitimate. These exchanges helped produce homologous revolutions across literature and painting, while also generating new struggles over autonomy, as painters then had to free themselves from the interpretative authority of writers and critics (*RA*, 225–29).

The same concern with connection also shapes the report's treatment of national and foreign cultures. Principle VI argues that the history of cultural works—science, art, literature, philosophy, and so on—should be taught in its international, especially European, dimension. This does not mean simply adding foreign literatures to the national curriculum, for example. It means constructing a shared framework capable of situating national works within a wider historical whole. This is why the report proposes the production of teaching materials tracing the history of European civilisation and its cultural works, produced collaboratively by French and foreign specialists from different disciplines. It also recommends that teachers of French language and literature should work closely with teachers of foreign languages and literatures, on an equal footing (*PPEA*, 34). Through such collaborations, the connections between national and foreign cultural works would become part of what is taught, rather than remaining accidental or marginal. Students would still acquire a common culture, but that culture would be organised around relations between traditions, disciplines, and historical contexts, rather than around the exclusive prestige of a national canon. Here again,

unity is not opposed to plurality; it is produced through the historical understanding of plurality itself.

This concern with teaching materials reappears in Principle VIII, 'L'usage des techniques modernes de diffusion' ('The Use of Modern Media'). If Principle VI asks what kind of common culture should be transmitted, Principle VIII asks how it might be made widely available. The report argues that the state should use modern media—especially television, videocassette, and networked information and communication technologies—not to replace teachers, but to support them by circulating high-quality educational materials across the school system. In this way, the production of shared cultural frameworks would be linked to new means of dissemination. The aim here was to reduce inequalities between schools, regions, and social groups by making exemplary teaching available 'à tous et partout' (*PPEA*, 37),[22] while still leaving teachers responsible for explanation, discussion, practical exercises, and adaptation to the needs of their own students. Seen from the present, this proposal is strikingly prescient. The technologies named in the report now seem dated, but the underlying problem remains familiar: how to use new media to widen access to high-quality teaching without imagining that technology can substitute for pedagogy (*PPEA*, 37–39).

Principle IX, 'L'ouverture dans et par l'autonomie' ('Opening Within and Through Autonomy'), extends this same concern from technologies to people and institutions. Just as modern media should support teachers without replacing them, outside participants should be brought into the life of the school without undermining the autonomy of the teaching body. The report proposes that schools should involve external stakeholders in their deliberations and activities, coordinate their work with museums, libraries, theatres, cultural centres, and other institutions of cultural diffusion, and thereby become centres of associational and civic life. But this opening is inseparable from autonomy. The school should not become a passive receiver of outside demands, nor should teachers be reduced to organisers of interventions by others. On the contrary, the report insists that the teaching profession must be revalued and strengthened through greater competence, authority, and professional autonomy. In this respect, the proposal again

22 'to everyone and everywhere' (trans. J.S.).

remains strikingly current: collaboration with external experts, whether artists, writers, or—more commonly, today—managers, consultants, employers, technology providers, and other representatives of real-world expertise—is valuable only when it enriches pedagogy rather than outsourcing it (*PPEA*, 41–44).

Principles III and VII return to the central problem raised in Principle II. Principle II calls for the diversification of forms of excellence. Principle III, 'La multiplication des chances' ('The Multiplication of Chances'), seeks to ensure that students are not permanently judged according to one dominant model of success. Success should not become permanent consecration, and failure should not become condemnation for life. The report therefore calls for a multiplication of pathways, easier movement between them, and the weakening of irreversible breaks within the school system (*PPEA*, 21–25). Principle VII, 'Une éducation ininterrompue et alternée' ('Uninterrupted and Alternating Education'), extends this anti-fatalistic logic over the whole life course. If education can continue beyond youth, and if periods of study can alternate with periods of work, then the school's early verdicts lose some of their force. The boundary between education and employment would no longer function as a once-and-for-all transition after which previous failures are almost impossible to repair. Lifelong and alternating education is therefore not only an answer to economic and technological change. It is also a way of loosening the temporal structure through which the school turns early advantage and disadvantage into durable social destiny (*PPEA,* 35–36).

Principle V, 'La révision périodique des savoirs enseignés' ('The Periodic Revision of Taught Knowledge'), calls for programmes, textbooks, and teaching methods to be reviewed periodically, so that obsolete or secondary knowledge can be removed and new developments introduced where they are genuinely useful. The report warns against novelty for its own sake: the point is not to keep changing curricula in order to appear modern, or to import the latest intellectual fashion before its pedagogical value is clear. But it is equally critical of inertia. The aim is to prevent disciplinary traditions and institutional routines from preserving outdated content, unnecessary requirements, or overloaded programmes simply because they have already been institutionalised in examinations, textbooks, and professional habits. In this sense, curriculum reform is presented as another struggle against scholastic consecration: what has

once been taught should not continue to be taught merely because the school has made it legitimate (*PPEA*, 29–32).

Finally, Principle IV, 'L'unité dans et par le pluralisme' ('Unity Within and Through Pluralism'), moves from individual students and classroom practices to the organisation of the school system as a whole. Its central point is that schools and universities should be more autonomous and more diverse, but not simply left to compete in a free market. Different institutions should be able to develop different strengths, specialisms, and pedagogical identities. Such pluralism, however, would only be just if the state actively prevented it from becoming segregation. The state must therefore guarantee a *minimum culturel commun* ('common cultural minimum'), in which the study of literature could play an important role. This minimum should include mastery of the common language, both written and spoken, especially in public situations, as well as, where possible, early access to a foreign language (*PPEA,* 27). Recapitulating many of the points made elsewhere in the *Propositions*, the state should also support teacher training, the definition and evaluation of pedagogical practices, the periodic revision of programmes, and the provision of high-quality teaching materials, as well as targeted support for the most disadvantaged students and institutions (*PPEA*, 27–30).

The state thus plays an important role in the future of education envisaged by the report. However, state support cannot be allowed to translate into dependence, normalisation, or control. The state should provide resources, guarantees, and corrections against inequality, but it should not impose a single pedagogical or cultural model from above. As we will see in the next section, this blueprint for protected autonomy also shapes Bourdieu's wider cultural policy thinking. Autonomy does not mean refusal of public support, but the use of public resources to secure the conditions under which teachers, researchers, writers, artists, and other cultural producers can work without falling under the control of either political authority or the market.

In the event, of the nine principles set out in the Collège de France report, the Mitterrand government retained only three: Principle IV, 'l'unité dans le pluralisme'; Principle IX, 'l'ouverture dans et par l'autonomie'; and Principle V, 'la révision périodique des savoirs enseignés' (*I*, 199). These were not insignificant, but they were also among the principles most easily translated into the language of

administrative reform: institutional pluralism, school autonomy, openness to external partners, and curriculum review. They could be made compatible with existing state procedures, committees, and programmes. By contrast, the more radical proposals—especially the diversification of forms of excellence, the multiplication of chances, and the weakening of irreversible scholastic verdicts—would have required a deeper transformation of the French school system. The fate of the report therefore illustrates the difficulty of implementing it as a system: its most manageable elements could be retained, while the principles that most challenged the structure of scholastic consecration were easier to leave aside.

The Collège de France report had its most visible institutional afterlife through one of its more practical proposals: the periodic revision of what schools teach. This idea reappeared in the Bourdieu–Gros report, *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus de l'enseignement* (1989),[23] commissioned by Lionel Jospin. Narrower in scope than the 1985 report, it focused on curriculum content: how programmes might be reviewed according to explicit criteria, with attention to overload, obsolete material, disciplinary inertia, and the pedagogical value of what is taught. This narrower focus translated more directly into institutional action, especially through the creation of the Conseil national des programmes. The trajectory is revealing: the principle that most easily became a reform mechanism was also the one most easily separated from the report's more ambitious aim of transforming the hierarchy of school-valued competences.

Although its impact was limited, the Collège de France report should not be seen as a failure. Indeed, in the concluding section 'De l'application des principes' ('On the Application of the Principles'), its authors anticipated many of the obstacles that stood in the way of its application: institutional inertia, disciplinary corporatism, formal equality masking unequal conditions of learning, the difficulty of rewarding real pedagogical innovation, and the danger that reforms intended to transform the school would be neutralised or diverted by the very institution they sought to change (*PPEA*, 45). In this respect, the report was realistic from the outset about the conditions of its own

23 Pierre Bourdieu and François Gros, 'Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus de l'enseignement', in *I*, 277–95.

reception. Its value, then, lay not in immediate implementation alone, but in its capacity to define a coherent standard of judgement for future reforms. As well as guiding aspirations, it could function as what Bourdieu described as 'une espèce de butoir': a reference point against which regressions, compromises, and abuses of power in educational policy could be measured (*I*, 210).[24]

More than four decades after the publication of the Collège de France report, some of its proposals now seem uncontroversial, even commonplace, at least in many Western educational systems. This is true especially of the use of educational technologies to widen access to teaching materials, the periodic revision of curricula, and the idea that opportunities for education should continue beyond initial schooling. Other proposals remain desirable but difficult to implement in practice, especially sustained collaboration between schools and external cultural institutions, and easier movement between educational tracks. Still others are both conceptually and institutionally challenging: the creation of genuinely equivalent pathways through the school system, or the weakening of the hierarchy between theoretical, technical, artistic, and practical forms of excellence. These proposals require both a transformation of mental categories and an education system capable of holding together principles that often pull apart: diversification and unification, autonomy and state support, openness to the outside world and protection against external control. But many of the propositions were not new even when they were written: they had already been formulated, and sometimes tested, in isolated contexts. What was new was the attempt to bring them together and implement them as a whole, across the education system. For the same reason, the report's apparently contradictory character was almost inevitable: it tried to make practically compatible principles that educational debate usually opposes. Precisely because it tries to hold together tensions that usually split educational debate into opposing camps, the report remains a valuable and suggestive resource, for individual classroom practice as much as for wider policy contexts.

The report's implications for literary education can be summarised in several key points. First, literary works should be taught historically,

24 'a kind of buffer' (*Political Interventions*, 166).

with attention to the conditions in which they were produced, circulated, and received. This means situating literary history alongside contemporaneous developments in other fields of cultural production, including art, philosophy, science, and technology. Such an approach can help students understand literature's relations with other cultural practices and histories, including those beyond the national context. Second, literary education should not be limited to commentary on canonised works. It should also include practice and production: speeches, reviews, reports, theatre, film, and other forms of written and oral expression through which students develop a genuine command of language. Finally, the report suggests that access to literature should not be left to the accidents of cultural inheritance and social privilege, but actively widened through mastery of the common language, confidence in public expression, contact with cultural institutions, high-quality teaching materials, and teachers with the autonomy and competence to mediate between works, students, and the wider cultural world. Classic literary culture therefore remains part of the curriculum, but not as the dominant model of intelligence and legitimacy, and not as a merely formal requirement subordinated to supposedly more serious subjects such as science and mathematics. Instead, it becomes one element within a broader education in historically informed reasoning and practical cultural competence.

## Between the state and the free market

As we have seen, Bourdieu's critiques of literary education, together with the cultural policy proposals set out in the Collège de France report, show that participation in literary culture cannot be reduced to the inclusion of literary works on a curriculum. It depends on a wider set of pedagogical and institutional conditions: teachers, teaching materials, mastery of written and spoken language, books and libraries, and forms of state support capable of reducing inequalities in the distribution of those resources. Yet Bourdieu's cultural policy thinking does not stop at the school. The school can help produce readers with active cultural competences: it can give students the instruments needed to appropriate demanding works, and equip them with the dispositions to take part in cultural life as readers, writers, critics, and informed publics. But these

dispositions need an object and a setting beyond the school. Students leaving education need to encounter a steady circulation of new works; reviews, journals, and critics capable of orienting them within that circulation; bookshops and libraries where such works can be found, bought, borrowed, and discussed; and theatres, radio, television, and other cultural institutions that give literary and artistic works a public presence beyond the classroom. If these spaces are weakened or commercialised, the competences formed by education risk having no real object or public life.

Bourdieu makes this point sharply in 'Maîtres du monde, savez-vous ce que vous faites ?', a paper delivered on 11 October 1999 to the Conseil international du musée de la télévision et de la radio.[25] The setting was significant. Bourdieu was addressing senior figures from television, publishing, finance, and European cultural policy: precisely those actors whose decisions shaped the increasingly concentrated media and cultural industries he was criticising. Referring directly to publishing, he cites the case of Thomas Middelhoff, chief executive of Bertelsmann, which had acquired Random House in 1998. According to the report Bourdieu quotes, Middelhoff had given the group's hundreds of profit centres two years to meet strict profitability targets, with all sectors expected to secure a return of more than 10 per cent on invested capital (*I*, 419–20). The significance of the example is that such targets alter the practical conditions under which writers and editors work. If publishing houses are judged by short-term profitability, editors are pushed towards books with predictable sales: recognised names, established genres, marketable formats, and works already adjusted to existing demand.

Fewer writers can be supported under such conditions, and those who are supported increasingly need the backing of large firms able to finance advances, marketing, distribution, and media visibility. At the same time, concentration weakens the smaller publishers and bookshops that might otherwise provide alternative routes for authors and readers. Independent publishers can take risks on first books, translations, experimental forms, or works whose audience has still to be created; independent bookshops and reviews can help such works find

25 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Maîtres du monde, savez-vous ce que vous faites ?', published as 'Questions aux vrais maîtres du monde' in *I*, 419–24.

readers without requiring immediate mass visibility. When these actors are bought out, marginalised, or driven out of business, however, the space available to less established, more experimental, or commercially uncertain writers contracts. The result is not only fewer opportunities for individual producers, but a narrowing of literary diversity itself.

Interestingly, speaking to these *maîtres du monde*—media executives and investors—Bourdieu does not rely only on his usual arguments about literature's use value, or on the autonomy of cultural production as a condition of intellectual and artistic freedom. Instead, he tries to show that the pursuit of maximum immediate profit may be self-defeating even in economic terms, given rising education levels:

> Si l'on sait que, au moins dans tous les pays développés, la durée de la scolarisation ne cesse de croître, ainsi que le niveau d'instruction moyen, comme croissent du même coup toutes les pratiques fortement corrélées avec le niveau d'instruction (fréquentation des musées ou des théâtres, lecture, etc.), on peut penser qu'une politique d'investissement économique dans des producteurs et des produits dits 'de qualité' peut, au moins à terme moyen, être rentable, même économiquement (à condition toutefois de pouvoir compter sur les services d'un système éducatif efficace) (*I*, 422).[26]

Here, Bourdieu is suggesting that it could be in the interests—and even the economic interests—of publishers and media groups to support the producers of 'quality' works, since some of these works may eventually become the consecrated literature, art, and cinema of the future. Investment in such creators would therefore not be pure charity or cultural piety; it could also be a long-term strategy, provided that an effective education system continued to produce the readers, spectators, and cultural competences on which this market depends. As Ahearne notes, this argument may well be casuistry: 'such harmony between the interests of media entrepreneurs and autonomous cultural

26 'Since we know that, in all the developed countries at least, the length of school attendance is still steadily growing, as well as the average educational level, and all those practices strongly correlated with it such as museum or theatre attendance, reading, etc., we can imagine that a policy of economic investment in producers and products described as "quality" could even be economically profitable at least in the medium term, on condition however that this could count on the services of an effective educational system' (*Political Interventions*, 344).

producers seems improbable'.[27] But the argument is consistent with one of Bourdieu's political tactics discussed in Chapter 5: turning the dominant economic logic against itself, by arguing that even from the standpoint of self-interest, a strictly economic policy is not necessarily economical (*CF1*, 45).

No doubt recognising the limits of appealing to the enlightened self-interest of media executives and publishers, Bourdieu ultimately looked to the state to protect the conditions of autonomous cultural production. The French literary field already benefited from significant forms of public support: the fixed book price associated with the Loi Lang, a reduced rate of VAT on books, and schemes such as the Fonds d'intervention pour les services, l'artisanat et le commerce (FISAC), which provided a degree of protection, however partial and incomplete, for independent publishers, booksellers, and other fragile intermediaries in the literary field. However, in the 1990s, neoliberal reforms associated with the GATT/WTO framework, especially the attempt to extend free-trade rules to services such as education, health, and culture, began to threaten the capacity of states to maintain such protections. Bourdieu saw these reforms not simply as economic deregulation, but as an attempt to extend market logic to domains—education, health, culture, libraries, museums, broadcasting—that had previously been protected, at least in part, as public goods. For literature in particular, the danger was that national and non-commercial producers would be exposed to unrestricted competition with the economically dominant pole of the global cultural field, whose actors possessed far greater resources for publicity, distribution, and market capture.

Bourdieu made these arguments in an open letter addressed to the director-general of UNESCO in 2000 (*I*, 451–54), as well as in several other public interventions, such as a video transmitted to protesters at the People's Summit in Quebec in 2001 (*I*, 461–64). If education, libraries, museums, broadcasting, publishing, and other cultural services were treated as ordinary market sectors, states would be stripped of the instruments through which they could protect cultural autonomy, public access, and national or regional cultural diversity. Measures designed to defend non-commercial cultural production—subsidies,

27 Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy*, p. 72.

licences, quotas, fixed book prices, public funding—would be redefined as so many obstacles to free trade. Citizens exercising rights of access to education, libraries, museums, and cultural access would be recast as consumers, with access increasingly determined by purchasing power and commercial profitability rather than public guarantees. These trends went against what UNESCO nominally stood for: promoting cultural diversity and supporting the creative economy. Bourdieu and his co-signatories therefore called on the director-general of UNESCO to oppose the extension of GATT rules to these domains. The appeal appears to have had little immediate effect.

In hindsight, Bourdieu's fears about GATT/WTO liberalisation were not realised in so direct or immediate a form. The French state retained important instruments of cultural protection, including the Loi Lang and related measures protecting book prices and independent bookselling. But the point here is less to assess the accuracy of Bourdieu's prediction than to identify the principle underlying it. For Bourdieu, cultural autonomy depends on a fragile relation to the dominant powers surrounding the cultural field. Cultural producers need protection from the economic pole, whose logic of profitability, speed, and market expansion threatens to reduce works to products. That protection usually depends on the state, which can combine legislation, taxation, redistribution, education policy, and market regulation on the scale required to slow or qualify the direct pressure from the market. This is why, in the era of globalisation, Bourdieu defended the state as one of the few remaining powers capable of resisting the direct exposure of culture to transnational capital. Yet the state itself can introduce its own forms of dependence, normalisation, and control. The problem is therefore not simply how to defend culture against the market, but how to secure public support without allowing that support to become another form of heteronomy.

Bourdieu's concern was not only that the state might censor cultural producers directly. Official recognition tends to go to those who recognise the state in return. This creates a kind of reciprocal exchange between political power and the less autonomous fractions of the cultural field. The state offers honours, invitations, commissions, subsidies, visibility, and symbolic legitimacy; in return, cultural producers lend the state their prestige, making political power appear cultivated, enlightened,

modern, or intellectually serious. As we saw in Chapter 3, Bourdieu showed that writers may turn the political and material protection offered by figures close to power into a source of autonomy. During the Second Empire, Princess Mathilde Bonaparte's salon provided writers with support, protection, and access to honours that could free them, at least partially, from the economic pressures of journalism and the market (*RA*, 91–93). The same exchange, however, can also threaten autonomy. The more cultural producers depended on recognition from political power, the more they risked adjusting themselves—consciously or not—to the expectations attached to that recognition. What first appeared as protection can therefore become a source of domination (*RA,* 89).

In *Libre-échange*, Bourdieu gives this mechanism a contemporary political form. He criticises recent socialist governments for exploiting the weaknesses of the literary and artistic fields to impose their 'sollicitations' and 'séductions' (*LE*, 23).[28] His target was the political courting of writers, artists, intellectuals, and film stars through receptions, committees, public endorsements, advisory roles, and other forms of official attention. Such gestures may look like support for culture, but they can also bind cultural producers to political power, if they come to rely on recognition from outside the field. Moreover, not all cultural producers were equally disposed to accept such recognition. Those least secure in the autonomous field, or most dependent on external forms of consecration, were also most likely to respond to political solicitation. State recognition could therefore distort the field's own mechanisms of judgement, elevating those most available to political power rather than those most recognised according to the autonomous criteria of the field.

State censorship can also operate through commissions and committees that decide which writers, publishers, festivals, journals, translations, residencies, or literary institutions deserve support. This is the point Bourdieu makes when he writes of a *cooptation négative* ('negative co-optation') leading to the normalisation of scientific or artistic research (*RA*, 554). Funding commissions may favour writers and publishers who are already recognisable according to official categories: serious but not too difficult, innovative but not too disruptive, socially useful, nationally representative, or compatible with existing

28 'solicitations' and 'enticements' (*Free Exchange*, 13).

institutional expectations. This can strengthen the most acceptable forms of literary production, while leaving more marginal, experimental, or hard-to-classify work without support. In this respect, state patronage can produce an effect analogous to that of the market, even though it operates through different criteria. The market favours works that are immediately profitable, easily recognisable, and adjusted to existing demand. The state may favour works that are culturally respectable, administratively legible, or politically useful. In both cases, the danger is a reduction of autonomy: the literary field is shaped from outside, either by commercial demand or by official categories of value.

The answer, for Bourdieu, is not that cultural producers should renounce state support, but that they should insist on having independent control over the forms and uses of that support. Public aid should be increased, especially for non-commercial cultural enterprises, but it should not become a means of steering cultural production towards politically useful, bureaucratically recognisable, or officially sanctioned forms:

> Il faut qu'ils travaillent simultanément, sans scrupule ni mauvaise conscience, à accroître l'engagement de l'État et la vigilance à l'égard de l'État. Par exemple, s'agissant de l'aide de l'État à la création culturelle, il faut lutter à la fois pour l'accroissement de cette aide aux entreprises culturelles non commerciales et pour l'accroissement du contrôle sur l'usage de cette aide. […] C'est à la condition de renforcer à la fois l'aide de l'État et les contrôles sur les usages de cette aide […], que l'on pourra échapper pratiquement à l'alternative de l'étatisme et du libéralisme dans laquelle les idéologues du libéralisme veulent nous enfermer (*LE*, 77–78).[29]

This, then, is the basic logic that underpins much of Bourdieu's cultural policy thinking. Cultural production must be protected from the market, but also from the forms of dependence that public support can introduce. Against the market, Bourdieu insists on state support for

29 'They must work simultaneously, without scruples or a guilty conscience, to increase the state's involvement as well as their vigilance in relation to the state's influence. For example, with regard to state support of cultural production, it is necessary to struggle both for the increase of support for non-commercial cultural enterprises as well as for greater controls on the use of that assistance […]. It is only by reinforcing both state assistance and controls on the uses of that assistance […] that we can practically escape the alternative of statism and liberalism in which the ideologues of liberalism want to enclose us' (*Free Exchange*, 73).

non-commercial and relatively autonomous cultural work. Against the state, he insists that such support must be subject to controls capable of preventing political capture, bureaucratic normalisation, or symbolic co-optation. The aim is not to choose between liberalism and statism, but to escape the alternative itself: to use public resources to protect cultural autonomy without surrendering that autonomy to public power. Bourdieu's position is therefore neither simply statist nor simply liberal. It is a defence of protected autonomy: the use of public resources to secure the social conditions of non-commercial cultural production while preserving the independence on which formal experiment, intellectual challenge, and cultural renewal depend.

# Conclusion

More than two decades after Pierre Bourdieu's death in 2002, we face a cultural landscape very different from the one in which his sociology of literature was developed. The forms of mediation have changed; the technologies of circulation have multiplied; the pressures bearing on literary production, criticism, and education have been reconfigured. Yet the underlying structure of the problem remains strikingly familiar. The tensions Bourdieu identified—between literature and society, autonomy and dependence, scientific universalism and cultural plurality, exchange value and use value, intellectual detachment and political commitment, public protection and market pressure—have not disappeared. If anything, they have become harder to disentangle, as market, media, bureaucratic, and even ostensibly democratic logics of access and participation increasingly overlap in the institutions that produce, transmit, and legitimise literary culture. Bourdieu's work on literature provides critics, writers, teachers, and readers with a set of instruments for thinking through these tensions without reducing them either to a simple defence of literature or to a simple denunciation of its social uses.

Bourdieu's field theory teaches us to see authors, readers, critics, publishers, schools, markets, and states not simply as external to literature, but as part of the historical conditions through which literary works become possible, legible, valuable, and symbolically effective. This is one reason why his sociology is so easily misread as reductive. Because it refuses to treat literary value as miraculous, self-grounding, or immune from history, it can appear to dissolve the work into its conditions. But Bourdieu's method also gives us a different way of understanding literary singularity. A work is not unique because it escapes history, nor because it issues from an uncreated creator, but because it constitutes a specific solution to a historically given problem: a way of taking up, refusing, transforming, and recombining the possibilities available within a field.

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What appears, from the charismatic point of view, as miracle or genius can be understood instead as necessity: the particular form a work had to take, given the author's trajectory, the state of the field, and the space of literary possibilities that it inherited and reworked (*RA*, 15).

This is not to say that all works are of equal value. Indeed, Bourdieu offers ways of thinking about literary value without returning to the fetishism of sacred works. The works most highly valued according to the autonomous principles of the field are those that succeed in resolving, or at least holding together, the tensions inscribed in a particular state of the space of possibilities. In the case of Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Bourdieu's main point of reference, this means a work that refers, implicitly or explicitly, to almost every pertinent possibility available to Flaubert: Honoré de Balzac's great realist precedent, Romantic sentimentality, the bourgeois novel, Champfleury's realism, Henry Murger's bohemia, Théophile Gautier's cult of art, and the Parnassian concern for impassivity and plastic exactitude (*RA*, 167). Such works are innovative because, by combining and transforming possibilities that had previously appeared opposed, they alter the structure of possibilities available to later writers. This is also what gives them their use value. They do not merely receive value from the field; they return something to it, enlarging the resources of perception, expression, and invention on which future literary practice can draw.

Another source of potential confusion is the form of reflexivity Bourdieu requires of his readers. This can take the explicit form of self-analysis, as in *Homo academicus* or *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*. But even the analyses in *Les Règles de l'art* are reflexive in a broader sense, because they operate by analogy. The literary field Bourdieu reconstructs may not be identical to the intellectual fields in which we are embedded, but it is sufficiently homologous to make readers recognise the logic of position-taking, investment, consecration, and distinction at work in their own practice. Just as importantly, it allows us to reconstruct the genesis of the categories of perception through which literature is ordinarily apprehended: the opposition between pure and commercial art, the belief in disinterested creation, the cult of originality, and the sense of literary value as self-evident. To have the foundations of our experience and understanding exposed in this way is apt to be disenchanting, and even to provoke resistance. This may be why Bourdieu's reflexive analyses have sometimes been read as an attack on literature, rather than as an attempt to understand the historical

conditions and mechanisms of literary belief (*RA*, 342).

The perception that Bourdieu's sociology attacks literature has also contributed to the charge of scientism: the suspicion that he subordinates literary experience to scientific explanation, and treats sociology as the final truth of literature. To understand Bourdieu's position, we need to separate his claim about the explanatory power of sociology from any simple hierarchy of disciplines. Bourdieu does insist that sociology can make explicit structures that literature often discloses only indirectly, through form, character, situation, and style. But this does not mean that literature is merely failed or unconscious sociology. Literary works have their own modes of knowledge, their own forms of symbolic efficacy, and their own capacity to make social reality perceptible. The relation between literature and sociology is therefore not one of replacement, but of partial translation, tension, and possible exchange.

This book has reconstructed Bourdieu's thinking about literature by bringing together arguments, concepts, analyses, and interventions from across his œuvre. Chapter 1 situated Bourdieu's literary sociology within the fields of production and reception that shaped it. It explained why his work on literature has often appeared to literary scholars as difficult, reductive, deterministic, or too specifically French, while also arguing that these objections are best understood in relation to the intellectual positions from which they were advanced. In doing so, it applied to Bourdieu himself the principle of double historicisation that he recommends for the analysis of literary and intellectual works.

Chapter 2 presented Bourdieu's method as an attempt to overcome the opposition between close reading and contextual explanation by relating works, authors, and forms to the structured space of positions and possibilities from which they emerge. It showed that Bourdieu's sociology does not simply add external context to literary interpretation, but asks how formal choices, stylistic solutions, genres, themes, and trajectories become intelligible within a relational space. The chapter also considered the limits and scope of this method: its applicability beyond the French case, and its extension to the analysis of world literary space. Finally, it examined the role of reflexivity in helping researchers avoid errors and biases.

Chapter 3 turned to the central notion of autonomy, tracing Bourdieu's account of the emergence of the French literary field as a long process of differentiation, autonomisation, and symbolic capital accumulation.

This chapter was crucial for the arguments that followed, because the concept of autonomy underlies Bourdieu's thinking about literature, science, politics, and cultural policy. It is the condition under which literature can develop its own forms, values, and criteria of judgement; the condition under which science can claim relative independence from common sense, journalism, politics, and the market; the condition under which writers and intellectuals can intervene politically in the name of values not reducible to political or economic interest; and the condition that cultural policy must protect if the literary field is not to be reduced to a market for cultural commodities.

Chapter 4 examined the most contested aspect of Bourdieu's project: his attempt to define the relation between literature and science. It showed that Bourdieu distinguishes literature and science as different modes of objectification: sociology makes social structures explicit through conceptual construction and empirical verification, while literature discloses them indirectly through fiction, form, character, situation, and style. The chapter then complicated this division, showing how Bourdieu's sociology draws on literary examples and techniques, and how writers such as Annie Ernaux transform sociological ways of seeing into literary form. Chapter 4 therefore presented literature and sociology as distinct but mutually illuminating practices: neither identical nor interchangeable, but capable of exposing possibilities and limits in one another. The chapter also acknowledged the potentially disenchanting effects of Bourdieu's analysis of literary belief. Yet, against the fear that sociological understanding can only dissolve literary pleasure, it showed that Bourdieu holds out the possibility of an *amor intellectualis rei*: a form of intellectual love in which understanding the historical necessity of the work becomes a source of intensified appreciation.

Chapter 5 showed how the resources of literature and literary criticism become politically significant in Bourdieu's work. It examined how Bourdieu applied literary modes of critique to dominant discourse: first, in the Flaubertian pastiche of the dominant ideological discourse; and later, in his hermeneutic analysis of neoliberal language, where close attention to euphemism, metaphor, repetition, and rhetorical slippage exposes the social interests hidden in apparently neutral political and economic speech. It also showed how Bourdieu looked to writers and artists for models of symbolic intervention, above all Karl Kraus, whose

use of satire, quotation, montage, and dramatic staging offered a way of turning the language of dominant institutions against itself. Finally, the chapter examined Bourdieu's attempts to give this critical function an institutional basis, through projects such as *Liber*, the International Parliament of Writers, and the broader ideal of the *intellectuel collectif*. These projects reveal both the ambition and the difficulty of his cultural politics: the desire to combine the autonomy of writers, artists, and researchers with the organisational strength needed to resist journalism, the market, and the state.

Chapter 6 moved from the possibilities for autonomous producers to intervene in public life to the role of the state in education, cultural transmission, and the protection of non-commercial literary culture. Focusing on *Propositions pour l'enseignement de l'avenir* and Bourdieu's later writings against neoliberal cultural policy, the chapter showed that his proposals were guided by the insights generated by his critical analyses. Literary culture can serve to legitimate social privilege when the conditions of its acquisition are hidden and its competences are misrecognised as natural gifts. Yet literature can also serve as an instrument of invention, criticism, and reflexive understanding: a stock of forms, languages, and perspectives through which experience can be perceived, expressed, and transformed. The production and circulation of such symbolic goods, however, require a degree of autonomy: agents and institutions must have enough freedom from the constraints imposed by the market, the state, the media, and bureaucratic administration to produce, publish, transmit, and judge works according to specifically literary criteria. From this analysis flow Bourdieu's main cultural policy positions: the need to make the conditions of literary competence explicit through education; the need for public support for non-commercial cultural production; and the need to ensure that such support protects, rather than compromises, the autonomy of the literary field.

This book has thus sought to move beyond the familiar image of Bourdieu as literature's enemy or disenchanter. What emerges is a sociology of literature that is at once a method of interpretation, a theory of literary value, a critique of cultural domination, and a basis for defending the institutional conditions under which literary culture can remain both autonomous and widely accessible. As such, Bourdieu's work can continue to provide a resource for writers, readers, critics,

teachers, publishers, and cultural institutions, as well as for researchers.

For writers, it offers a way of understanding literary practice in relation to inherited forms, available positions, and institutional constraints. For readers and critics, it provides a method for connecting textual analysis to the social history of genres, categories, and judgements, while also making possible a more reflective form of attachment to literary works: an *amor intellectualis rei*, in which understanding the historical necessity of a work becomes not the enemy of aesthetic pleasure, but one of its sources. For teachers, it gives sociological grounds to the kind of pedagogy outlined in *Propositions pour l'enseignement de l'avenir*: one that refuses to treat literary competence as a natural gift, makes explicit the codes and historical references on which reading depends, and uses literature as part of a broader formation in language, history, criticism, and cultural plurality. For publishers and cultural institutions, it clarifies why non-commercial forms of literary production and circulation require support, and why such support is most valuable when it helps protect the autonomy of cultural producers. Finally, for researchers, Bourdieu's work on literature remains a work in progress: a programme of empirical research whose object can never be exhausted, and whose results must therefore remain provisional and revisable (*RA*, 13). The empirical gaps in that programme can only be filled through further studies of particular works, authors, fields, and national traditions—a task that could go on indefinitely (*RA*, 303). At the same time, analysing diverse particular cases allows for what Bourdieu calls a '*comparatisme de l'essentiel*' ('comparativism of the essential'): a procedure for identifying the most universal properties of fields through comparison of their historically and culturally specific forms (*RP*, 29).

The value of Bourdieu's work on literature is therefore to be found not simply in the symbolic capital attached to his name, nor even in the originality of his approach, but, most usefully, in its capacity to generate new acts of research, criticism, pedagogy, literary creation, and political engagement.

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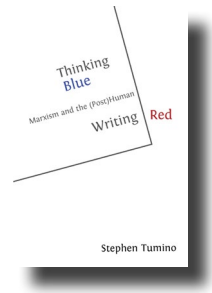


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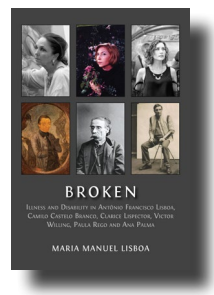


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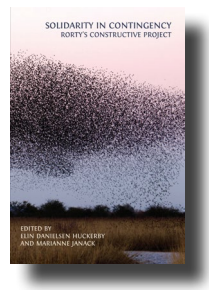

# Bourdieu and Literature

## John R. W. Speller

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